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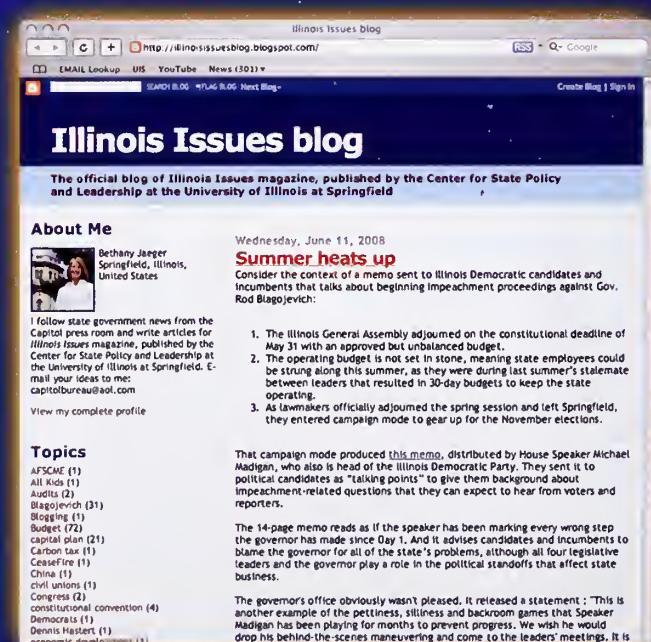
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The screenshot shows a blog post titled "Summer heats up" by Bethany Jaeger. The post discusses a memo sent to Illinois Democratic candidates and incumbents regarding impeachment proceedings against Governor Rod Blagojevich. The blog's header includes the text "The official blog of Illinois Issues magazine, published by the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Springfield". The sidebar features a "About Me" section with a photo of Bethany Jaeger and a "Topics" section with links to various political and legislative issues.

Dana Steffel



Statehouse press corps keeps dwindling

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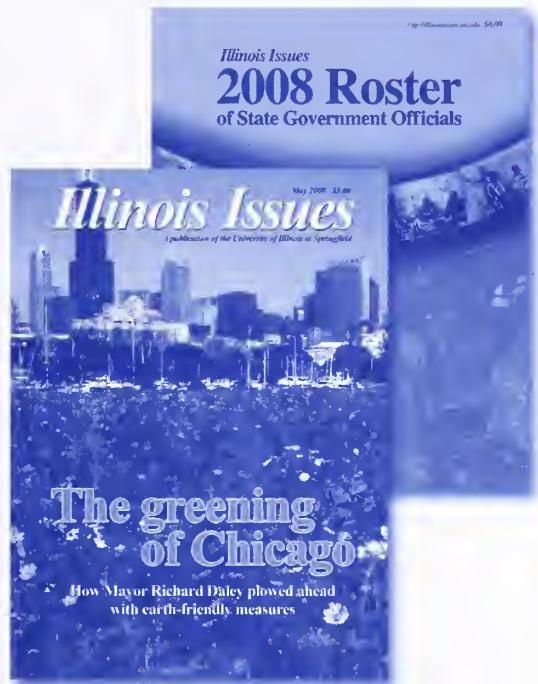
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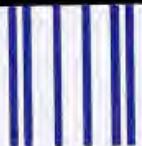
Illinois, and it's not even new. But it's gaining steam as media financial pressures stoke the fire.

Newspapers published in Rockford and Champaign, two of the largest Illinois cities outside the Chicago metro

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education policy and health care.

But "coverage of state government is in deep decline," bemoaned the *American Journalism Review* in a 1998 study of statehouse reporting across the nation. At that time, the professional



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Dana Heupel



Statehouse press corps keeps dwindling

by Dana Heupel

There are a lot more vacant offices and empty desks in the Illinois Capitol Press Room than there used to be. That may be good news for politicians and state government administrators who don't welcome media scrutiny. It's bad news for the rest of us.

Facing budget constrictions, several newspapers and broadcast outlets have closed their Statehouse bureaus or cut back their staff at the Capitol. As print publications, especially, scramble to reverse declines in advertising and readership, the latest mantra for many editors has become "hyperlocal," which means redirecting coverage to focus on issues closer to home. They've also begun to feature more "soft news," such as stories about celebrities or personal finance. And some have reduced government coverage, believing that readers find it boring and unimportant to their everyday lives.

The phenomenon isn't unique to Illinois, and it's not even new. But it's gaining steam as media financial pressures stoke the fire.

Newspapers published in Rockford and Champaign, two of the largest Illinois cities outside the Chicago metro

area, shuttered their state Capitol bureaus this year. The *Chicago Tribune* has pared its full-time Statehouse staff from two reporters to one. Several Springfield radio stations and a Champaign television outlet no longer have reporters stationed full time in the press room. Other casualties reaching back over a decade or more have included reporters who covered the Capitol for Alton and Belleville newspapers, and the bureau for United Press International, a national wire service that has dramatically downsized. Copley Newspapers, which has since sold its Illinois properties to GateHouse Media, and the *Chicago Sun-Times* also reduced Statehouse staff in years past.

Because of media consolidations, it's difficult to make comparisons over a long period, says Tom Massey, Capitol Press Room secretary, who has worked in the office for 35 years. But he says that at present, the press room in the Statehouse mezzanine — half a floor above the offices of the governor and other statewide officials; half a floor below the legislative chambers — houses 17 news bureaus, with 24 full-time print and broadcast journalists.

About three years ago, Massey counted 21 bureaus with 32 full-time staff.

Ray Long is president of the Illinois Legislative Correspondents Association and has covered Illinois government at the Capitol for the *Chicago Tribune* since 1998 and before then, the Associated Press, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Peoria Journal Star*.

"Society and democracy both suffer when fewer eyes are on government. Bigger papers like the *Tribune* can shift resources and adapt, but citizens suffer when many organizations cut back Statehouse coverage," Long says.

"People need to know when their public officials want to raise taxes, improve schools, spend wildly on pork-barrel projects or toughen requirements for getting a driver's license."

Over the past several decades, the federal government has shifted more responsibilities to state officials. Those increased duties include welfare reform, education policy and health care.

But "coverage of state government is in deep decline," bemoaned the *American Journalism Review* in a 1998 study of statehouse reporting across the nation. At that time, the professional

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journal compared the number of Capitol reporters to the number of press credentials issued for the Super Bowl. The ratio was about one to six. Although no current national figures are available, the number has certainly followed the downward path of economic indicators during recent years.

Large news organizations like the Associated Press and the *Tribune* still report on major state political and government stories, and the smaller outlets that still maintain Capitol bureaus diligently follow news that relates to their specific circulation areas. But what is lost in the dwindling overall number of critical eyes on state government is the middle ground. That includes reporting on such issues as human services or agricultural policy. Overall news coverage of the state's higher education system, for instance, suffered a blow when the Champaign newspaper closed its Capitol bureau, which had dug deeply into education policy because of the newspaper's readership at the main campus of the University of Illinois.

A catchphrase around the Illinois Capitol Press Room, where I worked for a decade for Copley and GateHouse news services, is that it takes at least two years for a new reporter to figure out what's really going on, given that nearly every public action by state legislators and other government officials has a hidden underlying motive. So the collective journalistic wisdom about the Statehouse also suffers when organizations lay off staff and close bureaus.

Uncertain times in the newspaper industry have reduced the overall number of journalism jobs, which sometimes has caused knowledgeable reporters to leave the news business. Kate Clements Cohorst went to work for the American Heart Association after the Champaign newspaper closed its Statehouse bureau, and Aaron Chambers joined the Serafin & Associates public relations firm after the Rockford paper eliminated his job. Kate has won a national journalism award for articles in this magazine, and Aaron is a former Statehouse bureau chief for *Illinois Issues*. They will do

well in their new positions, and their decisions to pursue other careers are certainly understandable. But their hard-nosed Statehouse reporting skills will be sorely missed.

Jeff Metzger, who joined the *Chicago Tribune* in 2007 and was laid off in August, is looking for a job at this writing. He had played a major role in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune's* Pulitzer Prize winning coverage of Hurricane Katrina before he arrived at the *Tribune's* Springfield bureau. More Statehouse layoffs by other news outlets could follow as executives prepare their budgets for the coming year.

Most news organizations that have cut Statehouse staff will rely more on the Associated Press for Illinois government coverage.

"We have a tradition of hard-hitting coverage of state government, and we're going to keep it up," says George Gartis, the AP's bureau chief for Illinois. Despite its own financial tough times, the news service intends to fill a vacancy at the Capitol, maintaining its Springfield staff at three reporters.

Newspapers and broadcast outlets certainly have an obligation to their shareholders and owners to make a profit. And as revenues dwindle, they are increasing efforts to provide more of what news executives believe readers and viewers want. That sometimes means, according to surveys, more "softer" news stories and less government coverage. So when financial troubles make job cuts necessary, Statehouse coverage is often among the first to go.

But there's also a civic obligation for news outlets to maintain their centuries-old status as watchdogs for the public, keeping vigilant eyes on the behavior of government officials. News organizations are protected by many laws — journalistically and financially — and public sentiment about those protections is waning.

Media executives must not forget that the First Amendment wasn't written simply to safeguard the paparazzi's rights to hound Britney Spears. □

Dana Heupel can be reached at heupel.dana@uis.edu.

Illinois Issues

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A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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Bethany Jaeger



Will Illinois reform school funding without another constitutional convention?

by Bethany Jaeger

The state has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education.

— The Illinois Constitution, 1970

Illinois' public education system is described as the haves vs. the have nots, primarily because school finance mostly depends on local property taxes. In the 2005-2006 school year, the most recent data available from the Illinois State Board of Education, property tax revenues funded nearly 60 percent of the cost. The state has contributed about 30 percent, or about \$7 billion annually, in recent years. So property-poor districts have less money to go around than do property-rich districts.

But that's primarily by design.

Framers of Illinois' 1970 Constitution meant to preserve local control, according to Ann Lousin, a delegate to the 1970 Constitutional Convention and current professor at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

"The ensuing debate encapsulated all of the issues of state vs. local control, state financing vs. local financing, increased funding vs. equality of funding, et cetera. We are scarcely any closer to resolving these deep-seated philosophical issues in 2008 than the convention was in 1970," Lousin writes in a report explaining her opposition to a statewide referendum that will appear on the November 4 ballot.

The first question will ask voters whether Illinois should convene another

The consensus [in 1970] was to insert language that prioritizes state funding of public education; yet, the language simply advises, not defines, state support.

convention to revisit the state charter.

Delegates could rewrite the entire document, or they could change one portion, such as school funding. Either way, voters would get the final say on whether to ratify the new constitution. But they could only accept or reject it in its entirety, not pick and choose its parts.

Opponents such as Lousin argue the 1970 Constitution was built to last. She and others say a convention could open Pandora's box, releasing the evils of narrow interests and political agendas.

A frequent guest speaker on the topic, Lousin recalls the 1970 debate over whether the Constitution should require 100 percent state funding, omit any reference to school funding altogether or draft language for "something in between."

The consensus was to insert language that prioritizes state funding of public education; yet, the language simply advises, not defines, state support.

Throughout 38 years, there have been numerous efforts to address the inequities through constitutional amendments, lawsuits and even recent boycotts of Chicago Public Schools.

None has succeeded, leading such advocates as Bruno Behrend to contend that a convention could clarify the state's responsibility to fund public education. The radio talk show host in Waukegan co-founded the Illinois Citizens Coalition, which supports the referendum, saying it would return power to the citizens and make government more accountable.

"I don't think this is that great a Constitution, and I don't think it's really a very good living document," he says. "What it is — and maybe it wasn't intended that way — but what it has become is something that's virtually unenforceable."

Yet a convention may not engender as much clarity as hoped. Even if voters agreed with a new education provision, they might not like other changes.

Because increased state funding for education likely would require more revenue from tax increases, suburban Chicago taxpayers, for instance, could oppose it because they already pay among the highest rates in the state. Anything less than a 60 percent favorable vote would sink the entire document.

Furthermore, even if enough voters approved a new education article, it would be very difficult for delegates to write

language that would guarantee change, says Charlie Wheeler, longtime Statehouse reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and current director of the Public Affairs Reporting graduate program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"It's pretty easy to put something in the Constitution that stops something from happening," he says. "It's a lot harder to get something in there to force something to happen."

The most recent momentum for change gathered speed in 2006, when state Sen. James Meeks of Chicago and Rep. David Miller of Lynwood, both Democrats, advanced legislation to increase state income and sales taxes and decrease the burden on local property taxes to pay for education. The so-called tax swap idea has had nine lives and numerous versions, but a survey by the Chicago Urban League and Voices for Illinois Children that year showed 66 percent of the 600 participants supported the tax swap concept if it meant equitable funding for schools.

Even business executives represented by the Civic Federation of Chicago agreed with the need to increase personal and corporate income taxes, provided the revenue chiseled away at compounding state debt and other chronic problems.

Momentum fizzled.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich repeatedly vowed to veto any income tax hike, and the business group withdrew its support because it lost confidence in state leaders to spend any new revenue wisely.

Meeks is trying again. In September, he organized a boycott of the first few days of school on Chicago's south side to draw attention to the disparities between his area and such wealthier districts as New Trier Township High School District 203 in Winnetka. He also met with the governor a few weeks later, but no progress was reported.

Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat, says the debate should be taken out of the politically charged legislative arena. He sponsored a bill to encourage Illinois voters to support the referendum for a constitutional convention.

"I have a lot more faith in the delegates to make the tough decisions than I do in the legislature," he says.

Miller says he agrees that the state should have a convention to focus the dialogue. "We need all the vehicles that are

Even if enough voters approved a new education article, it would be very difficult for delegates to write language that would guarantee change.

going to be available to us to try to move this issue forward."

The solution to education funding problems doesn't have to be a tax swap, he says. "It's not either or. It's all of the above. ... I think at the end of the day, we're trying to get grassroots support to solve this problem, which would, at least, help create political pressure for those in these [legislative] districts."

But opponents believe the issue is a legislative prerogative.

There's nothing stopping the General Assembly from making such changes, other than people saying, "Yeah, that's a good idea, but don't take it from me," says Abner Mikva, former legislator, congressman, judge and White House counsel.

"We don't need a constitution to point out our selfishness," he says.

Although Mikva and Lousin helped write the 1970 Constitution, they oppose this year's referendum and belong to an organized campaign of teachers' unions and business and labor groups called the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution. In a \$3 million campaign, they say the estimated \$100 million pricetag is too expensive, and the risk of opening up the entire document in the current political environment is too high. They fear individuals who want to add or subtract single hot-button issues, including bans on gay marriage or abortion. And they want to protect public employee pensions and health benefits.

Lousin says the state has a leadership problem, not a constitutional dilemma. Rather than rewriting the entire document, she promotes electing new officials and using the existing process of enacting individual constitutional amendments.

Of 18 amendments proposed, Illinois voters have ratified 10 and defeated eight. That includes a failed 1992 amendment

that would have required the state to be the predominant source of education funding.

In the past year, the House and the Senate advanced separate amendments that would have changed the state's flat income tax rate — currently 3 percent for individuals and 5 percent for businesses — to a progressive rate that increased with income levels. But both chambers soundly rejected the measures.

Lousin proposes forcing change with a deadline. In five years, for instance, the existing school funding system would expire. Districts could not float bonds based on property tax revenues without voter approval. The "drop dead date" would demand a commitment to change.

Wheeler says reform may not happen through the legislative process or through a constitutional convention, but it could occur with a change of characters.

"Either we get a new governor who recognizes fiscal reality, or somehow or other, Gov. Blagojevich turns over a new leaf and recognizes fiscal reality. And when that happens, I think we'll see it."

The Chicago Urban League hopes for answers before then. Following in the footsteps of a 1992 lawsuit, *Committee for Educational Rights v. Edgar*, the civil rights group filed suit in Cook County Circuit Court arguing that Illinois' educational system discriminates based on race.

"Our children, especially African Americans and Latinos, have been left behind because of poorly funded schools while their white counterparts in wealthy communities are thriving," Cheryle Jackson, president and chief executive officer of the organization, said in a prepared statement.

The complaint includes an argument that the financing of public education in Illinois violates the Uniformity of Taxation provision of the current Constitution. The plaintiffs want the court to declare the state's school system unconstitutional.

The 1992 case was dismissed. Even if the 2008 case wins a favorable decision, the court could bounce the issue back to the General Assembly, ruling that voters elected legislators to make such decisions.

With or without a convention, and with or without new leaders, school funding reform won't happen until voters and lawmakers are ready to make sacrifices. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

BUDGET REPERCUSSIONS

Historic sites and state parks close

Tourists may notice "closed" signs at state parks and historic sites this month as the result of budget cuts enacted this fiscal year. But there's a chance that state legislators could restore some of the funding before New Year's.

The cuts are rooted in an unbalanced state budget, estimated by the governor's office to fall short on revenue by \$2 billion as approved by the General Assembly. So Gov. Rod Blagojevich cut \$1.4 billion as he saw fit. The House later voted to restore more than \$200 million by sweeping excess money from dedicated state funds. Some of the money would prevent the parks and historic sites from closing, pending Senate approval. As of press time, the Senate still had not

considered the measure.

This month, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency is scheduled to lose 34 employees and close more than a dozen historic sites, including Springfield's Dana-Thomas House, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the former state Capitol in Vandalia.

Two historic sites in Chicago remain open because they each employ only one person, who must be present whether the site is open or closed, says Dave Blanchette, agency spokesman. The 13 other sites will remain closed other than for special events until the new fiscal year starts in July 2009 or until the legislature approves ways to raise revenue.

"We realize how much the communities depend on these sites, and so that's why we're trying to go this extra mile and work out some sort of way that they

can be open to accommodate special events, which do draw a lot of visitors," Blanchette says.

Abraham Lincoln sites will remain open, thanks to \$300,000 from the Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. The group is coordinating events statewide through 2009 to honor the 16th president's 200th birthday, which is part of a multiyear national celebration.

"Now, because of the Bicentennial Commission, the impact is going to be much less than it otherwise would have been," Blanchette says.

Eleven state parks also are scheduled to close in late November and would lose 39 employees, says Chris McCloud, Illinois Department of Natural Resources spokesman. One person would staff each state park for general maintenance and security.

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency



The Dana-Thomas House in Springfield is one of the historic sites set to close this month.

He could not say whether the parks will remain closed for the rest of the fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2009.

"This is a dollars-and-cents issue. The Department of Natural Resources does not have any kind of responsibility or say in crafting an overall state budget. That's

kind of up to those folks who make up the state budget and come up with revenues. We're just taking it one step at a time."

The House advanced a measure that would restore \$19 million to the IDNR budget. Sen. Linda Holmes, an Aurora

Democrat and lifelong Sierra Club member, says she is considering sponsoring a similar measure in the Senate. "Closing parks is such a huge impact on residents that I don't think we should be doing it."

Bethany Jaeger

Sites scheduled to close, except for special events*

- Dana-Thomas House, Springfield
- The Hauberg Indian Museum, Rock Island
- Lincoln Log Cabin, near Charleston
- David Davis Mansion, Bloomington
- Fort de Chartres, Prairie du Rocher
- Vandalia Statehouse, Vandalia
- Bishop Hill Museum, Colony Church and Bjorklund Hotel, Bishop Hill
- Carl Sandburg Historic Site, Galesburg
- Cahokia Courthouse, Cahokia
- Bryant Cottage, Bement
- Jubilee College, near Brimfield
- Apple River Fort, Elizabeth
- Fort Kaskaskia and Pierre Menard Home, Ellis Grove

State parks scheduled to close in November*

- Castle Rock State Park, Oregon
- Lowden State Park, Oregon
- Hennepin Canal Parkway State Park, Sheffield
- Illini State Park, Marseilles
- Channahon Parkway State Park, Channahon
- Gebhard Woods State Park, Morris
- Hidden Springs State Forest, Strasburg
- Kickapoo State Park, Oakwood
- Moraine View State Park, Leroy
- Weldon Springs State Park, Clinton
- Wolf Creek State Park, Windsor

*Pending Senate action

Social services hit

More than 400 public employee jobs will be lost next month if the House and Senate don't agree on a way to restore more than \$200 million in state budget cuts. If so, fewer people will be able to help low-income families access food stamps, investigate child abuse cases, interpret history or protect the environment.

The layoffs and facility closures add to recent staff cuts announced by Illinois' five constitutional offices (see *Illinois Issues*, September, page 10).

"Certainly these were difficult decisions, decisions that, quite frankly, we did not want to have to make," says Brian Williamsen, Gov. Rod Blagojevich's spokesman. "The revenue just wasn't there to support the spending that was sent to us. In the end, tough but responsible decisions had to be made, and they were made."

The public employee union American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees says the cuts already are causing harm. "These cuts are irresponsible and they are deep, slashing 12 percent of the front-line work force in child protection and more than 20 percent from historic preser-

vation," Henry Bayer, executive director of AFSCME Council 31, said in a prepared statement.

Without legislative action, the Department of Human Services will lose 73 employees, effective November 1, most from the division that provides food stamps and child care for low-income families.

The layoffs affect all offices, says Tom Green, DHS spokesman. "The impact on any one individual office will be minimal because of the fact that the positions were spread throughout the state."

The department also reduced grants to local service providers. Substance-abuse treatment providers have started to close their doors. Prevention services could be next.

Prevention and treatment services lost \$55 million in state funding, which could jeopardize the same amount in federal funding, says Karel Ares, executive director of Prevention First, a Springfield-based nonprofit that offers training and resources to organizations working to prevent substance abuse-related issues such as violence and teen pregnancy.

Ares says her agency was asked not to spend 13 percent of its state funding, while other providers have been asked to reserve about 3 percent.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services also is losing 306 positions next month. But 127 of those employees will be asked to fill other vacancies within the agency, says spokesman Kendall Marlowe.

"This is part of a process in order to minimize the impact of the reductions of moving some employees from lower-need areas to higher-need areas."

Those higher-need areas are spread throughout Illinois, not just in Cook County, he says, because some offices need more caseworkers while others need more people in the field to work with family interventions.

Marlowe says the more hopeful news is that DCFS is maintaining its contracts with private agencies that handle about 80 percent of the foster care cases in the state. "By maintaining those placement contracts at full strength, we're helping to minimize the impact of these reductions on the direct services that children receive on a daily basis."

Bethany Jaeger

AMENDATORY VETOES

Gov. Rod Blagojevich embarked on what he calls a “rewrite to do right” campaign, essentially furthering his agenda by altering legislation approved by the General Assembly. Lawmakers must either accept or reject his changes or the underlying bills die. The amendatory veto process has been controversial since the 1970 Illinois Constitution. Courts have ruled that a governor cannot completely rewrite legislation or change the fundamental purpose of bills. But the extent of individual changes is open to interpretation. Here are a few examples of Blagojevich’s amendatory vetoes, with some House action. The Senate had not acted on the changes by mid-September.

Political donations

HB 824 State contractors

- Original intent: It would prevent statewide officeholders, such as the governor, from awarding state contracts worth more than \$50,000 to businesses that donate to the officeholder’s political campaigns.

- Governor’s changes: Blagojevich extended the ban to also include legislators, political candidates and statewide political parties. He also added three provisions that would 1) clarify the process of accepting legislative pay raises so lawmakers had to vote “yes” on public record, 2) stop legislators from

working in another unit of government while they’re serving in the General Assembly and 3) require more detailed disclosure of lobbying work done by legislators or their spouses.

- Status: The House unanimously overrode the governor’s changes.

SB 2190 More contribution limits

- Original intent: It would make minor changes to election law.

- Governor’s changes: State legislators and officers also would be barred from accepting political campaign contributions from public employees of any unit of government, punishable by as much as a \$10,000 fine for each offense.

- Status: No action taken.

Health insurance

HB 5285 Young adults

- Governor’s changes: It is now law that all parents can extend their health insurance coverage to their children up to age 26. Veterans can stay on their parents’ insurance plans until age 30.

- Status: Both chambers approved the changes, and the governor signed this bill into law in mid-September.

HB 1432 Sexual assault victims

- Original intent: It would require insurance companies to pay for treatment of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in addition to other mental health services they already cover.

- Governor’s changes: The governor wants to add treatment and services for

sexual abuse victims, their parents, children, spouses, siblings, domestic or same-sex partners if they die or commit suicide from the abuse.

- Status: The House overrode the changes, 77-36.

HB 953 Autism services

- Original intent: It would expand mandatory insurance coverage of mental health services to also cover marriage counseling or therapy.

- Governor’s changes: He would require insurance companies to reimburse families for diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders for children younger than 21. The benefit would max out at \$36,000 a year but would be adjusted annually for inflation.

- Status: The House overrode the changes, 84-29.

Property tax breaks

HB 4201 Veterans’ tax breaks

- Original intent: Extends a tax increment financing district in the village of Downs in McLean County.

- Governor’s changes: Extend property tax exemptions to all veterans with a service-connected disability. The more disabled they are labeled by the federal system, the higher the property tax exemption.

- Status: The House rejected the governor’s changes, so the entire bill dies.

Bethany Jaeger

Grant Association to pull its collection

The Ulysses S. Grant Association severed its ties with Southern Illinois University Carbondale and wants to move a collection of more than 200,000 items covering our 18th president to Mississippi State University. However, SIUC claims the collection for the state of Illinois and has filed papers in Jackson County Circuit Court to prevent its removal, says David Carlson, dean of the university’s Morris Library. Since 1976, the Grant Association has received about \$3 million in federal funding for the collection.

The 44-year-old relationship between the university and the group fell apart shortly after its executive director and founder, history professor emeritus John Y. Simon, died unexpectedly at age 75, on July 8. Simon oversaw the publication of 30 volumes of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*. He wrote and lectured extensively on Grant, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

Simon received numerous awards for his scholarship. He was fired earlier this year after being accused by co-workers of making jokes that are deemed sexual harassment under current SIUC policy. Grant Association president Frank

Williams, who also is chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, declined to discuss with *Illinois Issues* the Simon allegations and the association’s decision to leave SIUC.

The Grant Association collects, edits, archives, researches, analyzes and publishes historical information and materials regarding the general’s military service in the Civil War, his personal life and his presidency.

The collection’s value cannot be measured in dollars, Carlson says, but it provides an “invaluable” centralized and organized source of materials for researchers.

Tony Hamelin

Debate grows over legal drinking age

More than 100 universities nationally have supported the Amethyst Initiative, a proposal that calls for a national debate on whether to lower the legal drinking age to 18 from the current minimum of 21. None of the 11 Illinois public universities had yet to support the proposal as of mid-September, and one school, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, announced it would not sign on.

The Amethyst Initiative began in Vermont, led by Middlebury College emeritus president John McCardell. It has sparked nationwide debate about public health and personal safety issues surrounding alcohol consumption by 18- to 20-year-olds. Seven states, including Missouri and Wisconsin, are considering referendums to lower the legal drinking age to 18.

After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, states were left to determine legal drinking restrictions. In the early 1970s, during the Vietnam War, Illinois and many other states lowered their drinking age. But, in 1984, the federal government passed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act in response to a rise in alcohol-related highway fatalities. To remain eligible for federal highway funds, states had to raise their legal drinking age to 21. Wyoming, in 1988, was the last to comply, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Illinois raised its drinking age from 19 to 21 in 1980.

Proponents of the debate cite numerous case studies, including one in 1999 by the Harvard School of Public Health that shows binge drinking often begins in high school.

McCardell says the current federal drinking-age law "is not working, stifles debate, promotes unsafe clandestine drinking by 18- to 20-year-olds and leaves college administrators, who must enforce the law on their campuses, with an 'abstinence-only campaign' that doesn't work." Of nearly 5,000 alcohol-related deaths reported in an American Medical Association study, "about 1,900 were highway-related, leaving about 3,000 that did not involve vehicles," McCardell says.

A 2004 study by the University of North Carolina reports that responsible

Presidential campaign visits Springfield

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Between 25,000 and 35,000 people packed around the Old State Capitol to see U.S. Sens. Barack Obama and Joe Biden appear together as Democratic running mates for the first time.

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Local emergency providers say at least 40 people suffered from heat exhaustion and related injuries from the 88-degree heat, high humidity and limited water intake during the crowded event.

drinking habits are learned behavior. Proponents argue that responsible consumption of alcohol should begin in the home by allowing 18- to 20-year-olds to drink under their parents' supervision. Additionally, a 2005 report by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health states that 85 percent of 20-year-olds had consumed alcohol, and 40 percent of those had reported binge drinking. The survey also found that alcohol use had increased since the passage of the 1984 federal law.

Shahram Heshmat, associate professor

of public health at the University of Illinois at Springfield, says alcohol abuse usually begins in the high school years and that abusers select colleges and social organizations within colleges that are permissive on the issue of alcohol consumption.

Addiction rates lower with age, so the earlier drinking begins, the greater the rate of addiction, says Heshmat, and lowering the current legal drinking age might result in even higher percentages of alcohol abuse.

Tony Hamelin

A stamp on history

Illinois stamp collectors and citizens can promote and preserve the history of the Prairie State with a new "Flags of Our Nation" postage stamp.

Unveiled last month, the 42-cent stamp showcases Illinois' agricultural roots and the future of its natural resources, symbolized by a countryside scene with a windmill and a sun on the horizon. The stamp also features the Illinois flag.

It's part of a national series that over three years will feature a "snapshot view" and the flags of all 50 states, five territories and the District of Columbia, as well as the Stars and Stripes, according to the U.S. Postal Service.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn, who attended the first-day-of-issue ceremony in the state Capitol and also has a stamp collection, says the Prairie State stamp is a great way to learn about Illinois history. The sunset and the windmill "harken to the past and the future," he says. "Power can come from wind and sunshine and can't be controlled by foreign dictators."

Springfield postmaster Doug Maxwell said at the ceremony that the flag symbolizes "unity, pride and the values we hold dear," echoing recent statements of David Failor, executive director of stamp services for the U.S. Postal Service.



Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn reviews the windmill and sunset featured in the Illinois "Flags of Our Nation" stamp during a ceremony at the Illinois State Capitol last month.

The first 10 stamps were unveiled in June. Illinois was one of 10 states in the second phase last month. The remainder will be issued in sets of 10 throughout 2009 and 2010.

Bethany Jaeger

For more news see the Illinois Issues Web site at <http://illinoisisissues.uis.edu>

Photograph by Glenn Holmes, courtesy of the Delavan Community Historical Society



The historical society in Delavan is taking steps to have an 1840 "pre-fab" house listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Town seeks national status for pioneer "pre-fab" house

A small two-story, seven-room home in the central Illinois town of Delavan is a reminder of life on the prairie in the early years of the state's growth, and the local historical society is taking steps to have the "colony house" listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 1840 house is unusual because it was framed with mortise-and-tenon joints in Providence, R.I., then disassembled and shipped with all the materials necessary to build it on the empty Illinois prairie — roofing, siding, windows and doors — as it would look on the East Coast.

"There were no sawmills or even timber close to their settlement," says Glenn Holmes, head of the Delavan Community Historical Society. "Their only other choice was a log cabin."

Delavan was a planned community, he says, designed by a wealthy group of investors, some of whom were part of a family of carpenters who were the early settlers. The first colony house they built was a large three-story "hotel" that they framed in Providence in 1837, then shipped over the mountains to the Ohio River, up the Mississippi River to the Illinois River to Pekin, then loaded onto ox carts to Delavan. It burned down in 1879.

Families stayed in the communal house until their own homes made a similar journey and were reassembled on their property. Until the settlers built their own sawmill, they ordered seven colony houses, constructed in Providence and shipped to the prairie by way of New Orleans and the rivers.

Other Illinois communities built colony houses that served similar purposes. Bishop Hill in Henry County was a religious community settled by Swedish immigrants. Its original four-story communal house was made of brick in 1848. It was destroyed by fire in 1928.

The Delavan "pre-fab" house was an unusual practice for the time, says archaeologist Robert Mazrim, author of *The Sangamo Frontier*. "Timber frame houses were constructed by local artisans of local materials in central Illinois by the early 1820s."

"This house is one of three remaining," Holmes says, "but it is the only one that is fundamentally unchanged."

Beverley Scobell

Campaign casts meth in an ugly light

It's an unusual sales pitch that would feature a photo of a filthy toilet stall and the words: "No one thinks they'll lose their virginity here."

But when you're trying to "un-sell" a product — as the nonprofit Illinois Meth Project is doing — such stark, disturbing images might work best. And an "un-sell" of the illegal use of methamphetamines appears to be a worthy goal: The Meth Project cites U.S. Department of Justice figures showing that Illinois ranks fourth among states in the country for meth-related arrests, and it points to a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 2007 student survey showing that illegal use of the drug costs the state roughly \$2 billion yearly.

The advertising/public service campaign is modeled after an anti-meth project in Montana that appears to have been successful by many measures, including large decreases in teen and adult meth use and meth-related crimes. In Illinois, ads have been appearing in the Springfield, Decatur and Champaign media markets and could be expanded into other downstate regions. They target youths between 12 and 17, an age group considered young enough to still make decisions about whether they will experiment with illegal drugs.

The project's executive director, Steve Mange, says that aiming a similar message at older teens and young adults is less successful.

"When the Montana group started to develop the ads, they spent hundreds of hours doing focus groups with teenagers," Mange says. "They talked to meth addicts, treatment counselors, law enforcement, but mostly talked to teenagers. One of the most disturbing elements that they found is that kids are making these decisions on whether they are going to try drugs when they are 12 and 13. The ads have got to get the attention of young teenagers; this age is considered the tipping point."

The best way to do that, the campaign found, is to try to connect with youth through the voices of teens themselves. "Teenagers are likely to tune out when they hear from an authority figure, so the [television and radio] ads in this campaign are all in the voice of and through the eyes



Image courtesy of the Illinois Meth Project

of teenagers. The radio ads are literally in the voice of teenagers."

And the ads are repetitive, appearing on YouTube and other Internet sources as a way to bombard youth with disturbing but potentially life-saving messages. Among the images presented are meth-using teens selling themselves for sex and clawing sores into their skin because they imagine bugs crawling on them. The campaign stresses the message that the highly addictive drug shouldn't be used — "Not even once."

"One-shot deals don't really work in the long term," Mange says. "With teenagers, they may hear at an assembly that drugs are bad for you, but if you surround them with the message, like you would with Nike or Pepsi, it's much more effective."

Thus far, the campaign's funding has come from the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation. Tom Siebel, a software billionaire who founded Siebel Systems and sold it to Oracle in 2006, started the Meth Project in his sometime home state of Montana, but wanted to bring it to Illinois, too, where he grew up.

The campaign has garnered support from Illinois politicians, including Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Secretary of State Jesse White, both of whom are on the project's board. Although state budget crises have kept the group from seeking public funds, Mange says organizers plan to approach legislative leaders in coming months. "We do expect widespread bipartisan support for this." Mange also credits the Illinois Sheriffs' Association. Greg Sullivan, association executive director, says, "The way to get to teens is to hit them right between the eyes."

Jennifer Halperin

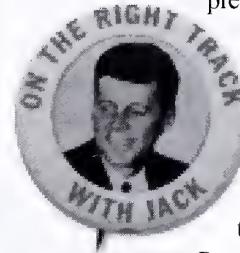
Alum donates campaign button collection

More than 1,500 pieces of historical presidential campaign memorabilia, including some from President Abraham Lincoln's election, will be on display at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale Museum.

The collection is the result of a lifelong endeavor of University of Massachusetts political science professor emeritus Jerome "Jerry" Mileur, an SIUC alumnus.

Mileur says his interest in collecting campaign memorabilia, which includes pieces dating back to President Andrew Jackson in 1832, began as a child, when his grandfather gave him a 1936 Franklin D. Roosevelt campaign button.

Over the years, Mileur has amassed a large collection of novel, hard-to-find pieces. They include



Campaign memorabilia from the collection of Jerry Mileur

memorabilia from the third-party political campaigns of Teddy Roosevelt from the 1912

Progressive Party, George Wallace from the 1968 American Independent Party, John Anderson from the 1980 Unity Party and Ross Perot from the 1992 Reform Party.

Before the invention of ink-and-metal buttons, presidents and their challengers used ribbons, banners and even imprinted coins to bolster name recognition and votes, Mileur says.

He donated his collection to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute. It will be on display at the university museum until Election Day.

Tony Hamelin

Photographs courtesy of Southern Illinois University Carbondale



Home state advantage?

An Obama presidency could send clout back to the Land of Lincoln

by Daniel C. Vock

Now that the Land of Lincoln — and Grant and Reagan — faces the possibility of another Illinois resident moving to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. in Washington, D.C., many Illinoisans want to know what a Barack Obama presidency would mean for his home state.

There is, of course, the obvious: Fellow Illinoisans would follow Obama to the White House to serve as advisers and aides; the nation would take a closer look at Illinois politics; and a presidential library eventually would draw tourists and academics after Obama left office.

Civic pride is also on the line. Think of President George W. Bush telling the 2004 Republican National Convention: "Some folks look at me and see a certain swagger. In Texas, we call it 'walkin'." Or Obama predicting the Chicago Bears would go "all the way, baby" on Monday Night Football in 2006.

But for most people in a president's home state, the effects of a native son in the White House are intangible. Virtually invisible, some say.

But supporters of Obama's Republican opponent from Arizona argue U.S. Sen. John McCain's pro-business approach also could translate into

gain for Illinois.

Still, others believe a homegrown president such as Obama promises a boon for Illinois. Jerry Roeper, head of

the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, compares an Obama presidency to the heyday of Michael Jordan on the Chicago Bulls in the 1990s, when basketball fans around the globe chattered excitedly about the Windy City.

"It's bigger than that," Roeper says of a potential Obama presidency. "There would be a spotlight that would shine on Chicago and the region both nationally and internationally."

Like the impact of Michael Jordan, the economic benefits to Illinois of having Obama in the White House would be tough, if not impossible, to measure, Roeper says.

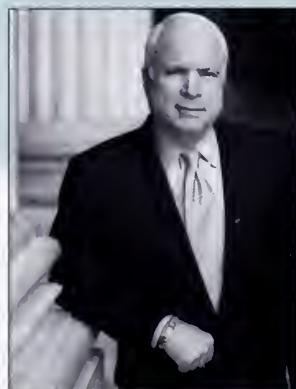
An Obama presidency could showcase Illinois, and not just Chicago.

"Look at Springfield and the prominent role it has played in the campaign so far," says Dan Shomon, a former Obama aide in the Illinois Senate, referring to Obama's decision to announce his presidential candidacy and later introduce his running mate, U.S. Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware, at the Old State Capitol.

Obama also likely would return to Chicago often, especially to keep his daughters "close to their roots" and to visit their family, adds Shomon, who served as a top



U.S. Sen. Barack Obama



U.S. Sen. John McCain

campaign operative during Obama's 2004 U.S. Senate bid.

Roeper hopes Obama would bring foreign dignitaries and other high-profile guests to Chicago, using the city's hotels and convention centers as a secure setting for those summits. But others questioned whether it would make sense to go through all the logistical problems of arranging security and accommodations in a big city when the president can already use the White House and the more remote Camp David in Maryland with fewer hassles.

On many big issues uniquely important to Chicago, Obama agrees with McCain. They're both likely to promote Chicago's bid to host the 2016 summer Olympic Games; they both support efforts to protect Great Lakes water from being diverted to parched cities and states outside the region; and both told the *Chicago Tribune* they would keep corruption-fighting U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald in his current post as long as Fitzgerald wants to serve.

Beyond policy positions, though, Obama supporters argue the Chicagoan understands the region's needs and would be more likely to address them than McCain.

In August, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley played up both Obama's and Biden's familiarity with big cities as an asset. Obama has lived in Chicago, New York and Cambridge, Mass.; Biden lives in Wilmington, Del., which is in the greater Philadelphia area.

"It could be the first time in a long time that we had the top two officials coming from an urban environment," Daley said. "I'm not just saying coming just from a big city or an inner city. I'm talking about an urban environment, and that includes [places such as] Kane County, Lake County and Joliet. It's urban; it's not just a city. It's a good perspective ... for the federal government, which is much more rural in its history."

That perspective could help Obama understand the urgency of improving the nation's infrastructure — especially its rail, road and air transportation systems — and investing more heavily in education, says the Chicagoland Chamber's Roeper.

State Rep. Jim Durkin, the head of McCain's Illinois campaign, counters that the Republican's stance on economic issues will actually help Illinois — and its financial markets, in particular — because it encourages growth. McCain wants to cut taxes on capital gains and dividends. Obama would raise capital gains taxes on families making more than \$250,000 but would cut the rate to zero for startups and small businesses.

"John McCain is a strong supporter of our markets, and for an Illinois

On many big issues uniquely important to Chicago, Obama agrees with McCain. They're both likely to promote Chicago's bid to host the 2016 summer Olympic Games; they both support efforts to protect Great Lakes water from being diverted to parched cities and states outside the region.

resident who lives in Cook County, John McCain is the last best hope against the tax machines out of Cook County and Springfield," Durkin says. "We don't want to force [businesses] out of the country."

One of the big unknowns is what Obama could bring to Chicago's Olympics bid.

In 2005, then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair flew halfway around the globe to Singapore right before a key G8 summit back at home to promote London's bid to host the 2012 games. Blair was the only head of state to personally lobby the International Olympic Committee before its meeting to select one city among five finalists for the prize.

London won the Olympics bid, besting Paris, which had been the frontrunner. Observers credited Blair's efforts for making the difference.

Obama's supporters say his popularity abroad and his ties to Chicago could put the Windy City's bid over the top. Indeed, Obama has already actively promoted Chicago's candidacy.

This summer, he surprised people with an unscheduled stop at a downtown Chicago rally to support the Olympics effort.

"In 2016, I'll be wrapping up my second term as president," Obama said in June. "So I can't think of a better way than to be marching into Washington Park ... as president of the United States and announcing to the world, 'Let the games begin!'"

But Chicago is the only U.S. city still vying to host the 2016 Olympics, and McCain or Obama could just as easily make the case to the international community when it decides on a host city in September 2009, many Illinois supporters of McCain point out.

"[McCain] likes Chicago. He likes the ballparks. He likes the Museum Campus. Chicago is a place [where] he has a lot of friends. He thinks it's a vibrant city. I know he would do everything within his powers to encourage the selection committee to choose Chicago," Durkin says.

Former Illinois Gov. Jim Thompson, a Republican deeply enmeshed in Chicago's political, business and legal communities, predicts Obama would only have a "marginal impact" on the Olympics decision.

In fact, Thompson downplays much of the hype about the potential benefits to Illinois of an Obama presidency.

"When somebody is elected president of the United States, they have an obligation to the whole country. They are not going to favor one city or state," Thompson says.

For example, Obama may well turn to Illinoisans to play key roles in his administration, especially within the White House, but Illinoisans frequently have been tapped for Cabinet posts under both Democratic and Republican administrations, he says.

Under President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld served as defense secretary, and Steve Preston is the current housing and urban development secretary. Bill Daley, the mayor's brother, was



U.S. Sen. John McCain, the GOP presidential nominee, at a campaign event.

commerce secretary under President Bill Clinton. Rockford native Lynn Martin worked as labor secretary under the first President Bush, and John Block of Galesburg was President Ronald Reagan's agriculture secretary.

"I feel fairly confident in a McCain presidency, you will have Chicagoans and Illinois residents as part of his administration," says Durkin.

Shomon, Obama's former aide, predicts the Democrat would likely tap legislators he served with in the Illinois General Assembly for his administration. Obama already knows his former colleagues, and compared with lobbyists, they would more easily pass scrutiny directed at new appointees, Shomon says.

He's so sure of it, in fact, that Shomon's lobbying firm is already trying to drum up business in

Washington, D.C., by touting Shomon's long connections to Obama.

The federal budget process gives presidents far less power to direct government spending to their home states — or even to supporters' home states — than Illinois' budget process gives to governors. Instead, Congress, for the most part, controls the purse strings, and powerful lawmakers have used their clout to "earmark" spending on defense contracts, highway and bridge improvements and other lucrative projects to their home districts.

Illinois' congressional delegation, which already holds considerable sway, could gain more if Obama is elected. On Capitol Hill, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin is the second-most-powerful Democrat in the upper chamber, and U.S. Rep.

Rahm Emanuel has quickly vaulted to a leadership post in the House.

But both Obama and McCain have railed against earmarks. Recent controversies over specific pet projects, particularly Alaska's \$223 million "bridge to nowhere," have also made Congress more queasy about supporting obviously provincial projects.

If the next president uses the bully pulpit to curtail those pet projects, the likelihood that Illinois would reap big-time projects on the president's clout alone would be pretty slim.

"If we're sitting around waiting for dollars to come in our direction, it isn't going to happen," says the chamber's Roeper.

Instead, Illinois leaders need to develop new ideas, particularly when it comes to spurring economic innovation, that can be used as a model



U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, appears at an August event in Springfield to announce U.S. Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware as his running mate.

for the rest of the country. If they could do that, Obama would be more likely to help his home state, Roeper says.

That, however, requires cooperation among state leaders, something sorely lacking in recent years. For decades, Illinois' school funding system has been criticized but never fixed, and state lawmakers can't agree on a public works program, though billions of dollars of federal aid are on the line, Roeper notes.

If there's a downside to having someone from your state in the White House, it's the intense scrutiny of the folks back home.

The constant questions over Bill Clinton's actions as Arkansas governor — especially dealing with the Whitewater real estate scandal and the suicide of aide Vince Foster — weighed heavily on Arkansans, who felt they

were caricatured by the media and Clinton's enemies, says University of Arkansas political science professor Janine Parry. The pressure was especially intense, she says, because Arkansas' political circles are so small, which meant nearly everyone knew a friend or neighbor who was being investigated.

When President Bush campaigned in 2000, he talked often about how Democrats and Republicans worked together in the Texas Capitol, unlike in Washington, D.C. But during Bush's first term as president, the Texas legislature drew the national spotlight when Republicans tried to redraw districts for state lawmakers and congressional representatives. House Democrats fled the state to try to foil the GOP plans. The showdown became fodder for late-night comics and an embarrassing

episode for Texas politicians.

And if Georgians thought they'd get special treatment from President Jimmy Carter, they were quickly proven wrong, says Charles S. Bullock III, a political science professor at the University of Georgia.

Carter vaulted from the Georgia governor's office to the White House with the help of a small circle of advisers. He took those confidantes to Washington, where they were derisively called the "Georgia Mafia." Even though his top aides hailed from Georgia — and many from near Carter's hometown of Plains — Georgians didn't get any special treatment from Carter. In fact, one of his first acts in office was to kill off water projects popular in Georgia. □

Daniel C. Vock is a reporter for Washington, D.C.-based Stateline.org.

Congressional call

Illinois contests may help to reshape the U.S. House

by Aaron Chambers

In the race for the 10th U.S. House District, which stretches from northern Cook County through the North Shore, Democrat Dan Seals is trying once again to unseat incumbent Republican Mark Kirk.

It's one of the hottest congressional races in Illinois — a contest that may help shape, or reshape, the House as Democrats fight to pad their nascent majority and Republicans attempt to recapture their lost ground. Thanks to their 2006 sweep, Democrats have 236 seats in the House, compared with the GOP's 199 seats. In Illinois, Democrats hold 11 of the state's 19 seats, while Republicans occupy the other eight.

A hot race also is under way in the south suburban 11th District, where Republican Jerry Weller is retiring. The district stretches from Chicago's far southwestern suburbs to Bloomington. Democrat Debbie Halvorson, the state Senate majority leader, was an early favorite to win. But Republican concrete mogul Martin Ozinga, a formidable fundraiser, has turned the race into a nail-biter — keeping alive GOP aspirations of retaining the seat.

Republicans also are trying to keep a congressional seat in the central Illinois 18th District, where Republican Ray LaHood is retiring. State Rep. Aaron Schock, who rose rapidly through GOP ranks, is facing Democrat Colleen Callahan, a career broadcaster.

Including the far west suburban 14th District seat vacated in late 2007 by J. Dennis Hastert, the former U.S. House speaker, the Republicans are leaving open

three seats in this election. Fermilab scientist and Democrat Bill Foster won the 14th District seat last March in a special election. Dairy magnate Jim Oberweis, a Republican and perennial candidate, is challenging Foster.

"It's unusual for Illinois to have so many competitive congressional races," says John McGovern, a GOP consultant. "That's the result of several retirements which have created open seats. Clearly, that makes us ground zero in the battle for both parties to gain control of Congress."

With this state's own U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Chicago at the top of the Democratic ticket, the congressional races in Illinois are especially dynamic. Democrats are trying to tie themselves to Obama as they work to link Republican candidates to John McCain, the GOP candidate for president, and ultimately, to President George W. Bush, the unpopular Republican. The Democrats are reaching for Obama's coattails as they attempt to build on the 30-seat gain they made nationally in the House two years ago.

"This November, Illinois has moved front and center in Democratic efforts to expand our majority where voters will have a clear choice: Illinois' own Barack Obama and Democratic House candidates offering a new direction in Washington versus John McCain and Republicans running to continue President Bush's failed policies," says Ryan Rudominer, spokesman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's Midwest operation.

The race in the 10th District typifies the challenge some Republicans face in this state during an election featuring Obama's race for president. Though Republicans have long held the seat, the district — at least in other contests — has in recent years leaned Democratic. In a recent interview, Kirk twice cited instances in which he voted with Obama in Congress — a peculiar point for an incumbent Republican, even one in Illinois, to make at election time.

But even as they maneuver around Obama's popularity, Republicans wish to juxtapose themselves from other powerful Democrats in Illinois. With Gov. Rod Blagojevich and state legislative leaders at loggerheads for the past two years, all-Democrat control of Springfield has become synonymous with gridlock and chaos. Republicans hope to spotlight that dysfunction to rally voters away from Democrats on Election Day.

"Rod Blagojevich would kill for Bush's approval rating" in the 10th District, Kirk says. "And [Cook County Board President Todd] Stroger would kill for Rod Blagojevich's approval rating."

Seals, a 37-year-old business consultant and former GE Capital executive from Wilmette, is trying to cast his bid as a chance for change from the status quo. He tried unsuccessfully to oust Kirk in 2006.

"This is really a race about more of the same from Mark Kirk and Bush and McCain versus change," Seals says. "And we see that on issues from the war in Iraq to

deficits we've had from our energy policy. Those are the sorts of things, where people say, 'Look, we need a new direction,' and that's what I'm fighting for."

The 10th District stretches along the lake shore from Waukegan through Lake Forest and Highland Park to Winnetka, Kenilworth and Wilmette, and west into Libertyville, Vernon Hills, Buffalo Grove, Arlington Heights, Northbrook and Glenview. Kirk, 49, has held the seat since 2001, when he succeeded Republican John Porter. He won a comfortable 53.38 percent of the vote in 2006, while Seals won 46.62 percent.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry took 51 percent of the district's vote

in 2004, to Bush's 48 percent.

Among other matters, Kirk and Seals are battling over energy policy. Kirk says the district's voters support "all of the above" — meaning they want new and renewable forms of energy as well as expanded drilling for oil, even off American shores.

Seals responds: "Of course we're going to keep drilling. But the real issue is how do we get off this dead-end street and find a new source of energy? How do we diversify?"

Both candidates express support for an end to the war in Iraq. Kirk says he wants to "wrap it up and bring one combat brigade home a month."

"Ninety-five percent of what's left to do in Iraq is political in nature and can only be done by Iraqis," he says.

Seals calls for "a phased withdrawal, a responsible exit from Iraq."

Kirk had \$2.86 million in his campaign fund June 30 after raising \$3.76 million and spending \$1.08 million during this election cycle, according to the Federal Election Commission. Seals had \$1.18 million on hand after raising \$1.99 million and spending \$985,622.48.

In the 11th District, which encompasses an area that includes Joliet, Kankakee, LaSalle-Peru and Bloomington, Ozinga and Halvorson also are focused on energy policy.

"My business is real sensitive to energy. We operate lots of trucks and the price of diesel fuel has gone up significantly, so we're really affected by it," Ozinga says. "I would hope that in this country, we develop an effective energy policy that pursues all forms of energy and options, which starts with drilling for oil everywhere we can find it."

Halvorson says in a statement on her Web site: "We must commit our nation to higher environmental standards and clean and renewable sources of energy. These goals are not only good for our environment but will improve our economy, generate jobs and make us more secure."

Despite repeated requests by *Illinois Issues*, Halvorson's campaign did not make her available for an interview.

Ozinga and Halvorson also diverge on social issues. Ozinga calls himself an anti-abortion "social conservative." Halvorson is supported by Emily's List, a group that backs pro-choice women in races for public office.

On the war in the Middle East, Ozinga is hawkish while Halvorson appeals to skepticism about the Bush administration's motives for initiating the military operation in Iraq and concern about the conflict's open-ended nature.

"We need to accomplish our goals before we pull out, which we're well on our way of doing," Ozinga says. "Overall, the approach to dealing with terrorism is best when it takes an offensive posture. I'd rather be fighting those issues in a place like Iraq or Afghanistan than here on our own soil."



Democratic congressional candidate Dan Seals from Wilmette



U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a Republican from Highland Park running for re-election





Democratic congressional candidate Colleen Callahan from Kickapoo



Republican state Rep. Aaron Schock, a congressional candidate from Peoria



Democratic state Sen. Debbie Halvorson, a congressional candidate from Crete



Republican congressional candidate Marty Ozinga from Homer Glen



U.S. Rep Bill Foster, a Democrat from Geneva, running for re-election



Republican congressional candidate Jim Oberweis from Sugar Grove

On her campaign Web site, Halvorson says: "At the outset of the Iraq war, too many questions about whether invading Iraq was the right decision went unanswered. We were misled by those we trusted to keep us safe. Now we are involved in an intractable war that has done little to make our country safer. We must bring our troops home safely and securely, making it clear to Iraqis that our commitment is not open-ended and that political progress must be made immediately."

Ozinga, 58, has tried to make much of Halvorson's ties to powerful Democrats, including state Senate President Emil Jones Jr. of Chicago and Blagojevich, in an attempt to cast her as a key player in "the mess that we have in Springfield."

"It's a chain-of-command arrangement," Ozinga says. "I would describe my opponent as a soldier in the machine Democrat organization."

Brian Doory, Halvorson's campaign manager, responds by alleging a connection between Ozinga's political donations and government contracts awarded to his firm. "When it comes to Illinois politics, Marty Ozinga is the perfect example of a pay-to-play political insider," Doory says. "He's given \$23,000 to the governor and thousands more to Chicago politicians, which has earned him millions in contracts from state and local governments."

Halvorson had \$916,636.92 on hand June 30 after raising \$1.23 million and spending \$354,000 over the election cycle. Ozinga had \$669,590.46 on hand after raising \$810,307.61 and spending \$210,912.19.

The 18th District blends urban and rural communities, stretching from Knox, Stark and Putnam counties south through Peoria to Springfield, east over the northern edge of Decatur, and west through Jacksonville to Adams County, just shy of Quincy. LaHood won a whopping 67.28 percent of the vote in 2006, while Democrat Steve Waterworth captured just 32.72. Bush won 57 percent of the district's vote in 2004, stomping Kerry's 42 percent.

Schock, a second-term state representative, is the front-runner because of his name recognition and the district's GOP slant. He was first elected to the Peoria School Board at 19 and later defeated an

incumbent Democrat in his first run for the Illinois House. He is just 27, the state's youngest legislator.

Callahan, 57, spent her career as a broadcaster with a focus on agriculture. Local Democratic Party bosses picked her to run after basketball coach Dick Versace stepped aside.

"Do I feel like the sacrificial lamb? No I do not," Callahan says, casting aside the notion that she faces little chance of winning the race. "Rather, I feel like the chosen one."

Both candidates are working aggressively to appeal to rural, more conservative voters. Callahan says her decades of informing and educating folks about agricultural news and trends endeared her to farmers and helped her cultivate support from traditionally Republican voters.

"I was and continue to be a representative of agriculture, a spokesperson on and for agriculture," she says.

Schock touts his own endorsement from the Illinois Farm Bureau. "This is her base," he says of his opponent.

Callahan is promoting stepped-up production of corn-based ethanol. Schock also favors expanded ethanol production. Additionally, he believes the United States should identify more overseas markets in which to sell agricultural commodities. He also favors abolishing the estate tax.

Schock favors drilling for oil offshore, as well as in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Callahan says she supports expanded drilling for oil but adds, "We can drill if we make absolutely certain that we are environmentally sensitive to where we are drilling and how we are drilling."

Schock expresses support for continued deployment of troops in the Middle East, at least in the short term.

"The role of Congress is to support our military from a funding side, make sure they get the tools and resources necessary to protect our country and our allies overseas," he says. "With regards to the war in the Middle East, I think the [troop] surge has worked, and the Iraqi government has given indications that they're ready to take over more security of their country, which is exciting."

Callahan emphasizes an end to the war in Iraq. "We've got to come home with an orderly timeline of withdrawal," she says.

Schock had \$299,341.95 on hand June 30 after raising \$1.5 million and spending \$1.21 million. Callahan had \$155,412.92 on hand after raising \$226,683.43 and spending \$121,270.51.

In the 14th District, Oberweis of Sugar Grove is making his fourth run for office in as many election cycles. He lost Republican primaries for U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004 and for governor in 2006.

Foster had \$442,934 on hand after raising \$2.04 million and spending \$3.47 million (his campaign debt totaled \$1 million). Oberweis had \$547,191.96 on hand after raising \$1.33 million and spending \$4.1 million (his campaign debt totaled \$1.64 million).

As in Hastert's former district, Democrats in the 8th District are working to keep another seat they recently took from Republicans. The district reaches from tiny Hebron in northern McHenry County south through Woodstock, McHenry, Wauconda and Lake Zurich to eastern Elgin, east along the state line to Winthrop Harbor and Zion, then southeast into Gurnee, Grayslake and Mundelein. Democrat Melissa Bean won the district seat in 2004 from longtime Republican Rep. Phil Crane.

Bean kept it in 2006, a tremendous year for Democrats nationwide, with just 50.9 percent of the vote. Republican David McSweeney won 44 percent, and "moderate" candidate Bill Scheurer took 5.1 percent. Bush won 55 percent of the district's vote in 2004, compared with Kerry's 44 percent.

In this election, Bean is trying to fight off a challenge from Steve Greenberg, a Long Grove businessman and former professional hockey player.

Bean had \$1.55 million on hand June 30 after raising \$2.68 million and spending \$1.27 million (her campaign debt totaled \$17,800). Greenberg had \$104,691.36 after raising \$675,930.70 and spending \$649,936.39 (his campaign debt totaled \$118,298.51).

In the west suburban 6th District — a seat held for a generation by GOP stalwart Henry Hyde — incumbent Republican Peter Roskam of Wheaton faces Democrat Jill Morgenthaler, an Iraq War veteran. Roskam had \$1.21 million on hand June 30 after raising \$1.77 million and spending \$767,960.58 (his campaign debt totaled \$37,151.54). Morgenthaler had

In the Illinois battleground for congressional races this year, Democrats hope voters will put them in control of at least two more of the state's 19 House seats.

\$230,898.51 on hand after raising \$495,232.60 and spending \$264,334.09.

Roskam won the seat in 2006, besting Democrat Tammy Duckworth, another Iraq war veteran.

In the southwest suburban 13th District, incumbent Republican Judy Biggert of Hinsdale faces a stiff challenge from Naperville businessman Scott Harper, a Democrat. Biggert had \$680,447.46 on hand June 30 after raising \$925,679.11 and spending \$485,802.52 (her campaign debt totaled \$298,250). Harper had \$300,061.51 on hand after raising \$374,408.95 and spending \$220,632.38 (his campaign debt totaled \$156,966.90).

And in the northern Illinois 16th District, incumbent Republican Don Manzullo of Egan faces a challenge from Barrington Hills Mayor Bob Abboud, a Democrat. Manzullo had \$577,103.60 on hand June 30 after raising \$969,565.97 and spending \$553,330.26. Abboud had \$13,754.63 after raising \$179,764.12 and spending \$226,254.36 (his campaign debt totaled \$91,569.04).

The 16th District runs from McHenry west through Winnebago, Boone and Ogle counties to the Mississippi River.

In the Illinois battleground for congressional races this year, Democrats hope voters will put them in control of at least two more of the state's 19 House seats. Republicans hope to avoid slipping even further away from the majority they lost two years ago. □

Aaron Chambers is a former Statehouse reporter who has since joined the Serafin & Associates public relations firm.

Target time

The Illinois GOP hopes to close the gap on Democratic legislative majorities. That may not be so easy

by Kurt Erickson

Democrats who control state government have left the state budget in disarray. They've failed to come together on a major public works plan that would put thousands of people to work. They've openly talked about impeaching their own governor.

With these examples of discord, you'd think Republicans would be poised to make significant gains in the Illinois General Assembly this November.

Think again.

With U.S. Sen. Barack Obama leading the ticket as the Democratic nominee for president, Democrats could be the ones who pick up even more seats in the legislature this year.

All told, there are 82 contested races for seats in the House and Senate on the November ballot. Of those, however, just a handful look to be competitive.

Voters in Chicago's suburbs, formerly a GOP bastion, will see the lion's share of the electoral fisticuffs, but contests in each region of the state could become heated.

In the northwest, an open-seat battle for retired Republican state Sen. Todd Sieben's seat pits Galena Democrat Marty Mulcahey against former Lee County Sheriff Tim Bivins.

In the south, incumbent Democrat Sen. Gary Forby of Benton faces fellow Bentonian Ken Burzynski, the brother of state Sen. Brad Burzynski, a Republican from Clare.

In central Illinois, state Rep. Aaron Schock's bid to replace retiring U.S. Rep.

Ray LaHood of Peoria has spawned an Illinois House race between Democrat Jehan Gordon and Republican Joan Krupa.

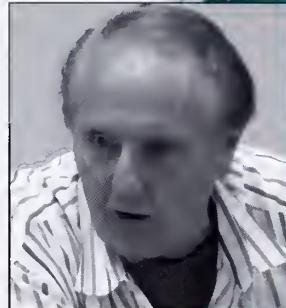
Republicans are looking to close the widening gap between themselves and Democrats, who hold a 37-22 majority in the Illinois Senate and a 67-51 majority in the House.

The race for Senate seats will feature two rematches in the suburbs, with incumbents Matt Murphy, a Republican, and Linda Holmes, a Democrat, again attempting to fend off tough challenges.

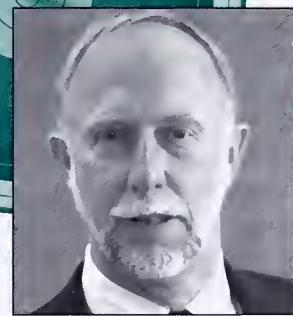
In the House, Speaker Michael Madigan is looking to gain at least five Democratic seats, which would give him a veto-proof majority.

He has painted targets on the backs of incumbent Republicans such as Beth Coulson of Glenview and Rosemary Mulligan of Des Plaines, hoping to add to his control of the chamber.

House Republican Leader Tom Cross, meanwhile, is looking to gain in areas such as southern Illinois, where longtime state Rep. Kurt Granberg, a Democrat from Carlyle, is retiring. Republican John Cavaletto of Salem has run for the seat twice previously and is squaring off this time against Marion County Treasurer Patti Hahn.



*Ken Burzynski,
Republican state Senate
candidate from Benton*



*State Sen. Gary Forby, a
Democratic candidate for
re-election from Benton*



But lurking over the shoulder of every GOP strategist is the specter of Obama, who could spur record voter turnout among Illinoisans.

"It's going to be a Democratic year. It just doesn't look like there's a lot of vulnerability," says Kent Redfield, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Cross downplays the potential Obama factor. "I think the phenomenon of him being the rock star will wane a little bit as the race tightens up," he says.

What's more, Cross believes legislative races outside of the Chicago area may not feel the effects of Obama on the ticket because state lawmakers enjoy a higher profile in downstate Illinois' districts.

Regional politics, Cross adds, also will play a role. "I think his effect diminishes as it moves downstate because it is a more conservative part of the state."

But while Republicans hope to thwart the effect of Obama's candidacy, they are adopting his strategy. At the Illinois State Fair in August, GOP dignitaries stood beneath a banner that read "Change."

"We need change in Illinois" by getting rid of Democrats who control state government, says Randy Pollard, Republican Party chairman in Fayette County.

In the 26th Senate District, the retirement of state Sen. Bill Peterson has opened the door for Democrat Bill Gentes to take on Republican Dan Duffy of Lake Barrington.

Duffy, a wealthy businessman, is expected to hammer away at the gridlock in state government under Democratic rule. Gentes, mayor of Round Lake, will likely try to focus on his service to the community.

Issues such as the economy, rapid growth in the district, taxes and transportation are likely to play a large role in the race, Gentes says.

"Those are the bread-and-butter issues," Gentes says. He's counting on a change in demographics in Lake County, as well as Obama's presence on the ticket, to help him upend his Republican foe.

"The Obama voter registration drive has been beneficial to Democrats overall," Gentes says. "The Obama effect has the potential to be huge."

Gentes says he believes Democratic discord in the Statehouse won't hurt his chances. "The vast majority of people in my suburban district seem to have no idea what's going on down there in Springfield, except to wonder why Gov. Blagojevich seems to be going crazy."

In the far northwest corner of Illinois, the retirement of Sieben, a Republican from Geneseo, has put his 45th Senate District seat up for grabs. Sieben helped pave the trail for continuing GOP control in the district by leaving office in May so his Republican protégé, former Lee County Sheriff Tim Bivins of Dixon, could be appointed to the seat.

Bivins is going up against Marty Mulcahey, a Galena Democrat who formerly worked for the Illinois secretary of state's office. He's now campaigning

for the post full time.

Mulcahey is running on a platform of economic development, saying the largely rural district is losing too many young people to larger cities. "We need to stop the exodus of jobs from this state and this country," says Mulcahey, whose father, Dick Mulcahey, represented the area from 1975 to 1992.

"There's no question that the Obama factor is going to be a benefit to me and other Democrats down the ticket," Mulcahey says. But he acknowledges the ongoing infighting among Democrats who control state government isn't doing him any favors.

"It is something that could play out as a negative," Mulcahey says.

Republicans are playing defense in the 27th Senate District, where GOP incumbent Matt Murphy of Palatine faces another race against Democrat Peter Gutzmer of Hoffman Estates.

Democrats are counting on an influx of Democratic voters into the area to help end Republican rule in a district that once elected conservative Peter Fitzgerald to represent them in Springfield before he went on to win a

Targeted races

SENATE

26th District

Bill Gentes, Round Lake Democrat
Dan Duffy, Lake Barrington Republican

27th District

Peter Gutzmer, Hoffman Estates Democrat
Matt Murphy, Palatine Republican (incumbent)

42nd District

Linda Holmes, Aurora Democrat (incumbent)
Terri Ann Wintermute, Bolingbrook Republican

45th District

Marty Mulcahey, Galena Democrat
Tim Bivins, Dixon Republican (incumbent)

59th District

Gary Forby, Benton Democrat (incumbent)
Ken Burzynski, Benton Republican

HOUSE

17th District

Daniel Biss, Evanston Democrat
Elizabeth Coulson, Glenview Republican (incumbent)

56th District

Paul Froelich, Schaumburg Democrat (incumbent)
Anita Forte-Scott, Schaumburg Republican

65th District

Aurora Auciaco, Park Ridge Democrat
Rosemary Mulligan, Des Plaines Republican (incumbent)

66th District

Mark Walker, Arlington Heights Democrat
Christine Prochno, Elk Grove Village Republican

69th District

Greg Tuite, Rockford Democrat
Ronald Wait, Belvidere Republican (incumbent)

92nd District

Jehan Gordon, Peoria Democrat
Joan Gore Krupa, Peoria Heights Republican

107th District

Patti Hahn, Centralia Democrat
John Cavaletto, Salem Republican

U.S. Senate seat.

Murphy beat Gutzmer, a firefighter, by about 3,200 votes in 2006.

Democrats are the ones trying to hold on in two other Senate districts.

In the 59th Senate District, Forby will attempt to shrug off a difficult legislative session, in which he was at odds with Senate President Emil Jones Jr. on some high-profile issues.

For example, Forby pushed to freeze skyrocketing electric rates but was stopped in his tracks by Jones, who favored a different outcome. Forby also opposed Jones when the Senate leader supported legislative pay raises. And Forby pushed hard for an ultimately failed statewide construction program.

With his brother, Brad, already serving in the Senate, Ken Burzynski is counting on the family ties to help him craft his campaign. Ken Burzynski says the strained relationship between Forby and the now-retiring Jones is an example of why voters should elect a Republican.

“Southern Illinois can no longer afford to wait on Sen. Forby and his Chicago-centered leadership to solve the most pressing issue facing our region: job creation,” Burzynski says.

Freshman Democratic state Sen. Linda Holmes of Aurora also faces a challenge. After narrowly winning in 2006, Holmes is again facing Republican Terri Ann Wintermute of Bolingbrook.

In the House, Chicago’s suburbs are again a battleground.

In the 65th District, Republican incumbent Rosemary Mulligan faces another tough challenge as Madigan looks to expand his majority. Mulligan, who supports abortion and gay rights, is being challenged by Democrat Aurora Austriaco, a Park Ridge attorney.

The retirement of state Rep. Carolyn Krause of Mount Prospect has also opened the door for Madigan to make inroads. Democrat Mark Walker of Arlington Heights is challenging Elk Grove Village trustee Christine Prochno for the 66th House District seat.

The 56th House District race also could be heated, with Republican-turned-Democrat Paul Froelich of Schaumburg attempting to fend off a challenge from Anita Forte-Scott. Froelich switched parties in the middle of last term, leaving Republicans hungry



Round Lake Mayor Bill Gentes, a Democratic candidate for the state Senate



Dan Duffy, a Republican candidate for the state Senate from Lake Barrington

to oust him for his flip-flop.

In the 17th House District, Republican Elizabeth Coulson is facing a challenge from Democrat Daniel Biss of Evanston, a political newcomer, who is credited with running a well-organized campaign.

In the early going, Biss was outperforming Coulson in raising money. State election reports show Biss raised \$50,000 more than Coulson in the first half of 2008. Coulson, who is in her 11th year in office, has attempted to position herself at the liberal end of the Republican spectrum in a district that is largely Democratic.

State Rep. Aaron Schock’s decision to run for a seat in Congress has put his 92nd House District seat in play. Democrat Jehan Gordon of Peoria enjoyed heavy financial backing from labor unions during a tough primary. She emerged and is facing Republican Jean Krupa of Peoria Heights.

In the Rockford area, Republican state Rep. Ron Wait of Belvidere is looking to continue his tenure as a lawmaker, which covers two stints in the House over the past quarter century. Wait’s opponent is attorney Greg Tuite, who came within 1,400 votes of beating Wait in 2006 without the help of the state Democratic Party.

In a reflection of his performance two years ago, Tuite already has been

endorsed by the state’s teachers unions.

“I am honored to have the support of local teachers and believe that we need to change the direction our state is heading,” Tuite says.

In southern Illinois, the departure of longtime state Rep. Kurt Granberg, a Democrat from Carlyle, has sparked a lively race between Republican John Cavaletto, a Salem businessman, and Democrat Patti Hahn, the Marion County treasurer. Cavaletto nearly beat Granberg in 2006, prompting Granberg to end his legislative career in search of a job within Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s administration.

While Cavaletto is a known quantity within the district, Hahn is expected to have the financial backing of Granberg and state Rep. Jay Hoffman, a Collinsville Democrat who is Blagojevich’s chief ally in the House.

Cavaletto is campaigning on a theme of economic development and says issues such as jobs and Democratic infighting in Springfield will play a bigger role in voter’s minds than Obama.

“People feel like they are getting cheated by the people who are in office up there,” Cavaletto says. “They are not talking about Obama. It’s not playing down here.” □

Kurt Erickson is the Springfield bureau chief for Lee Enterprises newspapers.

Q&A Question & Answer

Constitutional convention

In Illinois, the very first question on the ballot November 4 — even before the question of who shall be president — will ask voters whether Illinois should open up the state Constitution for a potential rewrite.

It's a choice voters might not get for another 20 years.

The last time they saw that question on the ballot was in 1988, when they rejected the idea by a 3-to-1 margin, with 900,109 voting in favor of a convention and 2,727,144 voting against it. But 1 million other voters skipped the question entirely.

The question appears on the ballot every 20 years, as directed by the 1970 Constitution. Still in effect today, it was the product of the 1969-1970 constitutional convention that rewrote a 100-year-old document.

The laws written about 38 years ago — everything from letting Chicago make its own laws to the flat income tax rate that is applied to rich and poor alike — were made to last. But some groups with such interests as school funding reform say the laws are outdated and, in the case of education, unfair.

Other groups such as the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution oppose the idea of a constitutional convention, popularly shortened to Con-Con, because they say the entire document would become vulnerable to powerful and emotional lobbying efforts with narrow interests. The alliance has said it plans to spend about \$3 million in a campaign to defeat the referendum.

When considering the ballot question, voters will have two choices. They can either vote for a convention and trust the current General Assembly to set the

rules for how the convention would work, or they can reject a Con-Con and leave it up to state lawmakers to change major policies through legislation or individual constitutional amendments.

Both have advantages and disadvantages, making it tough for voters to decide. But the decision gets more complicated when the general public has little understanding of how the process works or what the consequences would be. Many don't even know they'll be asked that question next month.

To help prepare voters for that first ballot question, here are pros and cons offered by former Illinois Comptroller Dawn Clark Netsch and Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn. They each spoke separately with Bethany Jaeger, Statehouse bureau chief. These are edited versions of those conversations. Read and listen to the full interviews at <http://illinoisisssues.uis.edu>.

PRO

Pat Quinn



The Illinois lieutenant governor is a former state treasurer and longtime consumer advocate. In 1983, he launched a drive to create the Citizens Utility Board, which still aims to preserve

affordable and reliable utility services. In 1980, he orchestrated a grassroots movement to enact the Cutback Amendment, which reduced the size of the Illinois General Assembly to its current 118 members in the House and 59 members in the Senate. He also previously served on the Cook County Board of Appeals and as Chicago's revenue director.

Q. Why do you support a Con-Con this time around?

Well, I think Illinois has some defects in the structure of our government, and the

best way to remedy those defects is with amending our Constitution. Defects are in the structure of government. A lot of gridlock occurs. I think people have become quite frustrated. And the good thing about a constitutional convention is, it doesn't last forever; the people who are elected delegates are there for just one point in history — they're not there to earn a pension for themselves or have a career as constitutional convention delegates — so it really is a special opportunity to do things for history that will help make our state a lot better for the people who are the heart and soul of our state, the citizens. Right now, I think Illinois government is too often captured by professional politicians, who don't always embrace reforms that are overdue.

Q. A constitutional convention is supposed to shield delegates from political influence. Do you think that's possible by today's standards?

I think it is. The last time they had a constitutional convention was about 40 years ago. The delegates were elected,

two from each state Senate district. Now we have 59 Senate districts, so there would be 118 delegates elected from across the state. It was done last time, and I think it should be done in the future, on a nonpartisan basis. So each person runs on their character and record. I think also one of the good things about it is, last time they did it, anyone could run for constitutional convention delegate. And then in the first round, the top four vote getters were selected to go to the second round. And then from that, the two delegates were elected from the last four. And I think that's a pretty healthy way to do things. I'm sure interest groups and all of them will be involved in this, but what happened last time — and I have confidence it will happen again — is voters will find the best people for a constitutional convention. The voters, I think, have good common sense and judgment, and I trust the people to elect good delegates.

Q. The legislative leaders get to set the rules of a convention. Do you trust the current leaders?



Samuel Witwer, president of the 1969-1970 Constitutional Convention, signs the final document.

It's not the leadership. It's the House and Senate of Illinois that have to adopt the rules, but I think history is a pretty good precedent. What was done last time, and — in fact, both [Chicago] Mayor Richard Daley and [House] Speaker Michael Madigan were elected constitutional delegates last time — I think they understand that that system was well-received by the public, and I think it'll be used again.

Q. What issues would you want changed through a convention, as opposed to through legislation or other amendments?

The only things that you can change are matters that involved constitutional amendments. That's what a constitutional convention's about. I think, by and large, the 1970 Constitution is pretty good, but after 38 years, there are several defects. And that's why a convention, I think, is needed to remedy those defects rather than let more decades go by without addressing those issues.

I think school funding is one of the key issues. They thought they had it solved back in 1970, where they said the State of Illinois would fund at least half the cost of education — elementary and secondary education — in Illinois. But the courts have held that the provisions of the current Illinois Constitution are only

advisory. They're not mandatory. So I think that is a key issue because the legislature has struggled with this for four decades. They have to come up with a constitutional amendment to reduce property taxes, to have the state pay more for education. The people of Illinois, I think, are very frustrated about that, and I think that's why a convention is in order.

I also think our state has been plagued by a corruption tax, caused by countless state and local officials being convicted of felonies for corrupting their offices. I think we need much tougher ethics standards and campaign finance standards that should be constitutionally mandated. It can't be changed by the mere whim of the legislature. So I think that's another key area of concern.

I think a third area is opening up Illinois government to more democracy, to letting citizens have the right of initiative to vote on issues, at least some issues, whether it be environmental or consumer issues or education issues, certainly tax reform issues. Right now, our state does not give citizens much opportunity to vote on issues. I think in the 21st century with the power of the Internet, it's a good way to educate people about issues, give them more say-so in their government.

And I do think that related to all this is reforming the Illinois tax system. The tax code today is fundamentally unfair to average people who live from paycheck to paycheck. They pay far more of their income in unfair taxes — property taxes, sales taxes, excise taxes — and our tax system needs to be reformed so we can give tax relief to people who need it the most, the hardworking families of Illinois. And I do not think that will happen unless you have a constitutional convention.

Q. How confident are you that current educational campaigns are effective so that voters understand the question November 4?

I think voters have a good grasp of major issues. This issue will be first on the ballot, even before president of the United States. The people of Illinois will get a good look at it. I've worked on a lot of referendums in my life, and I have always found that the voters get a good grasp of the issue. Now there's no question that the

other side will try and mislead the public. I think it's very important to point out that the cost of a constitutional convention is about \$1 a person in Illinois, roughly \$1 a person. You could have a no-frills, no-nonsense, frugal constitutional convention for about \$13-14 million, \$15 million. That's a lot of money, but that's about \$1 a person in Illinois to straighten out things that have been going wrong, costing taxpayers literally billions of dollars for the last 40 years. Now, the other side will try and exaggerate and mislead people. We shouldn't let them get away with it. The cost to the public today of all these convictions of politicians, including a former governor who is sitting in prison today, underline the importance of ending the corruption tax, which has cost Illinois hundreds of millions of dollars. And I think ethics and having recall and giving voters a chance to vote by referendum for tough ethics standards — those are things that are long overdue and worth the cost of a convention.

Q. If voters reject the referendum to call a convention, then what potential do you see for change?

Well, it's harder because the members of the legislature, particularly in the Senate this year, were resistant to reform, and they did the governor's bidding. They did whatever Gov. [Rod] Blagojevich wanted on the subject, as I mention, of recall. And also the whole pay raise fiasco. It took a literally 48-hour emergency Internet petition drive, where we got thousands of people in Illinois to send e-mails to Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Senate President Emil Jones demanding a vote on whether or not the politicians of Illinois should get a pay raise. They were just going to collect the money without a vote. That, alone, is a defect that I think is a mile wide in the Illinois Constitution today and needs to be remedied to sort of say, 'Well, we're going to rely on the politicians to reform themselves.' I don't think people really believe that's possible. So that's why a convention is a better way to go.

The people of Illinois elected delegates. The delegates are much more independent — they're not worried about re-election, they're not worried about a

pension. They see their role as being someone in history that changes something that really needs to be done in Illinois. So I feel strongly about this. I think this is, obviously from Barack Obama's campaign, a year where the Internet and people at large are getting involved in their government, whether it's for a political candidate of either party. I just think this is a healthy time in America and here in the Land of Lincoln to take a look at our basic document. The parts that are good we certainly want to keep, but we can propose amendments to the Constitution that make Illinois a better place to live for the next 20 years.

CON Dawn Clark Netsch



The former state legislator of a Chicago district was a delegate to the 1969-1970 Constitutional Convention. She served as vice chair of the Revenue and Finance Committee. A

former state comptroller and Democratic nominee for governor, she's now a professor of law emeritus at Northwestern University Law School in Chicago and frequent voice of the opposition to a constitutional convention.

Q. Why do you oppose a Con-Con this time around?

We still have, believe it or not, a very good Constitution, even though there are provisions that I would change, just as there are provisions that others would change. I think that most of those provisions could and should be dealt with individually. For example, do we want to get rid of a flat rate [income tax] requirement? I would rather we kind of focus on the income tax provision in the Constitution, and if we want to do anything different about it, do that rather than opening up the entire Constitution. I am deeply concerned what might come out of a constitutional convention on a number of issues.

And I guess I would emphasize the Bill

of Rights. We have one of the best and strongest Bill of Rights provisions in any state constitution in the country. And some of those provisions, clearly, would be under assault either directly or by superimposing other things on them, like the abortion issue. And I would hate to see us get into that kind of a mess again.

Most of what's frustrating all of us about the dysfunctional state government in Springfield right now has nothing to do with the Constitution. Almost any one of those issues could have been resolved, whether it was the transit crisis or the utility bill back a while ago or the budget right now, or whatever, whatever. Any of them are not being held up by constitutional provisions. They're being held up by an inability of the leaders to get together and work together. And there's nothing that we could write in the Constitution which would resolve those particular problems.

I worry that in a desire to strike out and sort of punish the people who are perceived to be the cause of the dysfunction right now, we could end up with a Constitution that would build in some provisions that don't help in the future.

Q. What was it like running as a delegate then?

It was almost like running for any office except that it was nonpartisan, which made a difference, obviously.

Even though most of us who ran were either Republicans or Democrats, there were some pure independents, and it was generally known. At least in Chicago, you hoped to have some help from those who were part of your party organization.

But even so, it was different in the sense that we were not officially running as under any party label, which meant that, at least for most of us, it meant you had to kind of get started on your own, in terms of finding some people to help, finding the office space, getting the petitions out and all that sort of thing. Now that's not completely different from running for a political office.

Q. How much money did you have to raise?

It was not big-time spending, and certainly nothing like what's going on right now. But you have to pay somebody, and if you have printed materials, you have to pay for those. If you have an

Photograph courtesy of Dawn Clark Netsch



Dawn Clark Netsch signs the 1970 Constitution.

office, you have to pay for it. There are expenses involved. And not surprisingly, in some ways, it's probably a little harder to raise money for something like a consti... — well, let me say, back then, it was probably harder to raise money for a constitutional convention because nobody sort of knew what it was or cared that much.

One thing that is going to be extremely different this time, if there is indeed a constitutional convention — if the referendum passes — there's going to be big money involved, I think, totally unlike 1970. And a lot of it's going to come from special interests. And I think the political parties are going to be very heavily involved this time, whether or not the legislature authorizes delegates to run on a nonpartisan basis. And I'm a little doubtful they would do that. But even if they do, my guess is that the parties are going to be big time — because there are big stakes, big issues at stake. And no question that the special interests are going to be involved very heavily in the campaigns and certainly in the fundraising.

Q. What kind of campaign efforts were out there to educate the public?

Bear in mind that, at least in 1970, there was extremely widespread support for the need for a constitutional convention and the desirability of having one. And they'd been going on for some years, sort of leading up to what became a successful referendum in 1968 to call a convention, which got, I recall, a 71 percent vote, something like that — an extremely high vote.

But there was more interest in it because there was such widespread support for it. Both political parties, all the civic groups, the business groups, the newspapers. Everybody wanted there to be a convention. Why? Because the state Constitution was so antiquated. And the feeling was that there were just lots of things that needed to be freed up, if you will, from the old constitution.

There were just a lot of things that were thought to be really horse and buggy and a need to just sit down and examine the whole document. That, of course, is very different from where we are today.

There are certainly some groups who want particular issues in the Constitution, and mostly, if you sort of look around, with a few exceptions, most of those who are the strongest advocates for a Con-Con now are people who want something that is not there. It's not that they object to what's in the Constitution. They might well leave it practically alone, but they want term limits or recall or that sort of thing.

Now, that's not 100 percent true. There are those who would like to change the Revenue Article. One group would want to eliminate the requirement of a flat rate income tax in an 8-to-5 ratio. And the other group would impose more restrictions on the legislature's ability to deal with an income tax by imposing caps or something that's a concomitant of it, which is requiring a three-fifths vote of the legislature for any increase of any tax or fee. In some cases, they may want the three-fifths vote to pass the budget.

Q. Groups who want to change the existing document still talk about the merit selection of judges. Do you think that would pass today?

I happen to be a passionate proponent of merit selection and was the principal sponsor of it for the 18 years that I was in the Illinois General Assembly. I would not hold a convention for that issue, and, to be perfectly honest, I think it's very doubtful we could even get that issue adopted in a convention.

It could be adopted as a constitutional amendment. Any of these could be done by the amendment process. The problem for some of the people who are proponents is that they are so mad at government that they don't trust anybody who is down there right now, and so they want to try to put together what they think may be a whole new group of people who might be willing to see things their way and adopt some of the proposals that they so far have not gotten adopted as individual amendments.

Merit selection could be adopted as an individual amendment to the Judicial Article. It has not been. I was not successful in getting it out of both houses. And I don't see much prospect for it right now. On the other hand, I

Learn more

Read about individual aspect of a constitutional convention in previous editions of Illinois Issues:

- November 2007, page 20 — Con-Con revisited and how 1970 could differ from a 2010 convention
- January, page 13 — Q&A with 1969-70 delegate Wayne Whalen
- January, page 19 — Separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches
- February, page 27 — The current Revenue Article could change
- Illinois Issues Blog, subject “constitutional convention”

don't see an awful lot of prospect for it in a constitutional convention for some of the same reasons. But some of those who do feel very passionately about that issue believe that is the only way that we would ever change the method of selection, and they're willing to risk everything else in order to try to have a shot at that issue.

Q. There are many issues that could be vulnerable to change. Do you think voters could feel overwhelmed to understand it?

We don't have any idea what actually would get adopted in a constitutional convention. We know some of the issues that for sure are going to be on the agenda. I mean, certainly, the social issues, the hot button social issues: same-sex marriage, civil unions, abortion, gun control. You know those are going to be issues in the convention.

You don't know for sure how the delegates are going to deal with them or how many they will deal with. So it's a little hard to say ahead of time how much will be changed in a constitutional convention, at this point. It could be a small amount. It could be a very large amount. We just don't know. It sort of depends on who gets there.

What we do know is that there is not the same almost unanimity of view that there needs to be a new constitution written. I think it's a much more piecemeal thing that people are looking at right now, one way or the other. □

‘Pay to play’

The governor takes lawmakers’ bet on ethics and raises the stakes

by Kevin McDermott

During an Illinois Senate committee hearing last spring on a landmark ethics reform measure, legislators appeared to be up to a familiar trick.

At issue was a bill to ban campaign contributions from major state contractors, what’s known in Illinois as “pay-to-play” politics. Everyone on the committee was ostensibly in favor of reform, of course — so much so that Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and other top Democrats were hinting they might want to load the bill up with additional reform provisions.

Everyone understood, however, that if that happened, the legislation would almost certainly collapse under its own weight.

“I’d almost bet you dinner [that] nothing passes” in the end, a frustrated Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson, a Greenville Republican, told the legislation’s co-sponsor, Sen. Don Harmon, an Oak Park Democrat.

Watson did, in fact, end up owing a dinner to Harmon, after the General Assembly unanimously sent the bill to Gov. Rod Blagojevich on May 31. It was a watershed event in the state’s ethically murky political system, the culmination of three years of negotiations to get rid of a controversial money machine that had produced uncounted millions of campaign dollars for state elected officials for decades, while fostering a national reputation of Illinois as a political system for sale.



Gov. Rod Blagojevich in August used his amendatory veto powers to alter ethics legislation that was unanimously approved by lawmakers in May.

“We’re taking the government back,” state Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat, said jubilantly at the time. “We have to end the cycle of corruption. We have to end government-by-cronyism.”

But the winding journey of **HB 824** wasn’t over yet. And it still isn’t.

Blagojevich, who, arguably, has benefited more than any politician in Illinois history from the practice that the bill seeks to outlaw, immediately began

hinting that he, too, wanted to "improve" the bill with an amendatory veto to add new provisions.

Again, this was widely understood as an existential threat to the reform measure, since any changes to the carefully calibrated bill would have to go back through a legislative process that had taken so long to come around the first time.

The bill's architects — primarily Harmon; state Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat; Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn; and lobbyist Cynthia Canary of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform — prepared for a fight.

With a House override of any veto seemingly assured, they focused on the weaker link — the Senate — pressing their case to Majority Leader Debbie Halvorson, a Crete Democrat, who had one eye on her approaching congressional race. Halvorson and others soon announced an unusual "guarantee" that both chambers would approve the original legislation over Blagojevich's objections if he tried to change it.

Blagojevich, it seemed, was in a box: He either had to humbly sign into law an ethics restriction that many lawmakers had publicly said was aimed squarely at him; or he had to veto (or amendatorily veto) it, which would make it look as if he were standing in the way of reform — and then face the likelihood of a humiliating override that would force the new restrictions on him anyway.

But Blagojevich, in a reminder of his crafty Chicago political roots, saw the bet and raised it.

He announced in August that he would, in fact, amendatorily veto the bill and issue an accompanying executive order that, together, would vastly expand the scope of the ethics restrictions. Now they would also affect legislators' campaign funds, their pay raises and even the second jobs that some of them hold in their local governments.

Blagojevich's office defends the changes as more of a good thing — ethics — and questions the opposition of legislators who are crying foul over the changes.

"We figured if it was good enough for the governor, it should be good enough for the legislature," says Blagojevich spokesman Lucio Guerrero. "Everyone

will be under the same umbrella."

But some say the real message was evident in the timing of the announced changes to the bill, on August 25, the first Monday of the Democratic National Convention in Denver. That was the day a series of key Blagojevich nemeses from Illinois government — Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Comptroller Dan Hynes, Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias — were scheduled to give convention speeches while the controversial Blagojevich was left off the program.

Even as those speakers were preparing to take the podium in Denver,

Blagojevich was back in Chicago making his announcement, stealing the Illinois spotlight and tossing the hot potato of campaign ethics back into the laps of legislators with whom he has been at political war.

"Antics," grumbled Lisa Madigan, in Denver, when she heard about the announcement.

"Petty," added Quinn.

State Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat, offered a cat's-away theory: "It was done on a day that most Democratic elected officials in Illinois were out of town ... [and] he made changes [to the bill] that benefit him," Lang said in Denver, where he reflected the general frustration of Illinois Democrats gathered there.

"We still have a little thing in Illinois called the Constitution," added Lang. "The Constitution does not give him the right to write legislation on his own. He's not the king; he's not the emperor."

Still, Blagojevich's move may take him out of the box and put the bill's supporters into it.

Now, instead of looking as if the legislature was reining him in on ethics, Blagojevich can once again claim the cloak of reform, touting his own unilateral move to end pay-to-play in his administration (while presumably glossing over the fact that he's the last of the statewide elected officials to unilaterally take that action).

The House took up the rewritten **HB 824** during its one-day special session last month, overriding the veto with little discussion and little dissent (the override vote was 110-3).

"This bill has seen more hurdles than the Beijing Olympics," Fritchey told his House

colleagues before the vote.

The hurdles aren't over. At press time, the Senate hadn't acted on the veto override, and Jones, the Senate president, had indicated he wouldn't do so until the November veto session, if at all.

That opened a constitutional question: Would the bill die if not acted upon within 15 days of the House override vote, as the state Constitution seems to say? Jones' staff argued, no, the 15-day clock doesn't start ticking until after the bill is read into the Senate record, meaning it can be pushed to November.

In any case, the whole thing presents a dilemma for lawmakers: If they ultimately override the amendatory veto (or let the whole thing die), they will effectively be blocking a reform measure aimed at themselves, just as they had accused Blagojevich of doing. "If it goes into place [as rewritten], then he's tougher than the legislature," says Kent Redfield, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "If it doesn't go into place, then he's on the side of the angels."

Here's a typical scenario:

In 2003, Illinois was seeking a contractor to oversee the creation of the \$50 million Sparta World Shooting & Recreation Facility in southern Illinois. A downstate engineering firm, Cochran & Wilken, already had provided a project "master plan" for state officials, so the company figured it was a shoo-in for the main engineering-consulting contract to oversee completion of the project.

But the newly inaugurated Blagojevich administration had other ideas. The administration reached around Cochran & Wilken and handed the lucrative new contract instead to a Chicago-based company, Knight E/A Inc., which had donated almost \$30,000 in chartered plane flights to Blagojevich's election campaign the previous year.

Knight E/A would go on to receive more than \$2.5 million in no-bid contract work on the Sparta project, while simultaneously tripling its overall state business through other contracts. Meanwhile, the firm's continued donations of money and services to Blagojevich's campaign committee would eventually exceed six figures.

There is no evidence that the administration steered the contracts with political

donations in mind (nor vice versa). Legally, that lack of evidence is all that matters. Illinois places no restrictions on the size or source of campaign donations.

That means that while it's illegal for a contractor to give money to an elected official in exchange for a state contract, it's perfectly legal for a contractor to give money to an elected official from whom the contractor just happens to be seeking a contract.

Many view that as a distinction without a difference.

"It's illegal to bribe, it's illegal to extort," notes Canary of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, "but it's not illegal to say, 'Nudge-nudge, wink-wink.'"

The circumstances around the Sparta project (first reported in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 2006) are by no means new nor unusual. A study by the Springfield *State Journal-Register* in the mid-1990s identified more than \$1 billion in state contracts held by political contributors; at least \$1 of every \$3 the state spent on contracted goods and services at that time had ended up in contributors' pockets, the newspaper found.

More than a decade later, that pattern remains as clear as ever. A *Post-Dispatch* study this year found that of the top 50 current state contractors, more than half, including companies from other parts of the country, are significant political contributors to Blagojevich.

Anecdotal examples abound of such suspect circumstances and are reported on a regular basis by the Statehouse media. The contracts in question are usually (though not always) for specialized professional services — consulting, engineering, legal advice — which aren't under the same competitive bidding restrictions as, say, paving highways.

There's no standard relationship between the size of the donations and of the contracts, but a frequent scenario involves contributions of five, sometimes six figures, and contracts in the millions of dollars.

"The danger is so great, in terms of conflicts of interest and public perception," says Redfield, the UIS political scientist. "It invites bribery and shakedowns. It poisons the process."

Despite loose state campaign finance restrictions that make it almost impossible

to get into legal trouble with political donations, some have managed to do just that. Most notable was former Gov. George Ryan, now in federal prison for crimes that included steering state business to favored contributors.

Among the original allegations against Democratic fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko was that he attempted to squeeze a state contractor for a donation to Blagojevich's campaign fund. (Rezko was convicted on corruption charges earlier this year; Blagojevich hasn't been charged with wrongdoing.)

The ethics bill the legislature approved this spring attempted to get at that hidden system with a narrowly drawn new campaign contribution restriction: Entities that hold more than \$50,000 in state contracts would be prohibited from contributing money to the elected officials who awarded the contracts.

Blagojevich, who has set records for raising campaign funds — largely from the wallets of state contractors — took that restriction and, in the amendatory veto and executive order, dramatically expanded it.

Under Blagojevich's executive order, contractors who work for the governor's office would be barred not only from giving money to the governor but from giving money to any state lawmaker or political party, as well, even if the political party or lawmaker has no control over the state contract.

The governor also amended **SB 2190** to forbid lawmakers and other state officials from taking contributions from any government employee.

Fritchey, the state representative from Chicago, questions both the legality and logic of banning donations from contractors to politicians who don't have any control over those contracts. "It's outside the bounds of free speech," he says. "It reflects a complete lack of understanding by the governor about what the issue of 'pay-to-play' is all about."

The amendatory veto of **HB 824** also would enact the same ban on statewide offices other than the governor's office, raising other constitutional questions, Fritchey and others say.

Additionally, the altered bill would change the way lawmakers get pay raises, requiring them to vote to accept the



State Rep. John Fritchey of Chicago is one of the authors of the ethics legislation.

money, rather than continuing under the current politically easier system that automatically puts the raises into effect if lawmakers don't reject them.

And it would ban some double-employment in government, such as a state legislator who also works for his or her local city or county.

"I don't think anybody can argue that it's a good thing to have two government jobs," says Guerrero, Blagojevich's spokesman.

But Blagojevich's critics were quick to label that last provision as a punitive attack on political adversaries. (The *Chicago Sun-Times* reports that 10 state lawmakers would have to quit their local government jobs under the rule — nine of them House Democrats, the bloc most at odds with Blagojevich these days.) Some argue that other provisions are unconstitutional because they stray too far from the original bill and infringe on the powers of other elected officials.

The key factor could be Jones, the Senate president and Blagojevich ally, who some supporters of the ethics bill accused of dragging his feet on it the first time around.

But Harmon, the Oak Park Democrat and Senate sponsor of **HB 824**, says all indications he's gotten are that there is "overwhelming" enthusiasm among Senate members to override the veto.

Meanwhile, Harmon has yet to receive the promised dinner from Watson, the Senate minority leader. Harmon says: "Still waiting on that." □

Kevin McDermott covers Illinois government and politics for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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State legislator returns from Iraq

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Republican state Rep. Jim Watson of Jacksonville, a staff sergeant with the U.S. Marine Corps, returned from Iraq in September.

He's back. And he's feeling lucky.

Not the kind of luck that makes one buy a lottery ticket. The kind that makes one feel fortunate.

Republican state Rep. **Jim Watson** of Jacksonville, a staff sergeant with the U.S. Marine Corps, returned from Iraq, where he helped build a unit of local government from scratch. During those six months, from February to August, he learned how lucky Illinois lawmakers are to have such an established form of democracy, he says.

After debriefing at Camp Pendleton in California, he returned to Illinois September 6, just in time for a special session of the House.

The transition from the Anbar province, one of the most volatile regions in Iraq three years ago, to Springfield, where he doesn't have to worry about where he parks his car for fear of a makeshift bomb, is surreal, Watson says.

"We're blessed. We are just blessed. And I think it's beholden upon us as elected officials to live up to what we have."

While most Americans celebrated Labor Day, the U.S. military handed over the Anbar province to Iraqi government rule. That's where Watson

spent long days working directly with members of the Anbar Provincial Council, which he compares to the Illinois House of Representatives, to establish such basic processes as recording votes and representing rural areas.

He drew from experience, down-loading Illinois' bylaws and picking portions that would work in a form of governance tailored for that part of Iraq.

"They had [almost] no bylaws. The bylaws they had were just bizarre. You think about just how lucky I was to have some of the folks in Springfield that I could call back to and say: 'Hey. I've got a constitutional crisis here. How would you interpret these things?'"

It was an exhausting challenge, he says. After five years of military occupancy, the American and Iraqi officials finally were able to develop precise processes so provincial council members could govern themselves for the first time, he says.

"It's one of those: 'What could we have done better? What could we have done worse?' I think one of the things we could have done better is have people doing what we were doing earlier."

He was at Camp Pendleton in California when the handover took place, but he says the action directly reflected the relentless push by his team to use the window of opportunity to teach Iraqis to build a nation.

"What it basically means is, one, it's time for them to step up. We're saying: 'We've done everything we can do. We feel pretty comfortable about where you're at. If you're going to make the next step, you're going to have to make it on your own.'"

Watson returned to Illinois days before the Illinois House met in an off-season session to discuss funding a statewide construction plan by leasing a state asset, the Illinois Lottery, to private investors.

But he says he brings a new perspective about the level of commitment it takes to follow through on a plan to success, however success is defined.

"What it basically means is, one, it's time for them to step up. We're saying: 'We've done everything we can do. We feel pretty comfortable where you're at. If you're going to make the next step, you're going to have to make it on your own.'"

"After seeing how hard it is to build what we have, it makes me more determined to try to protect it — and I don't mean that we've got to go fight — I mean that [we] not allow people to circumvent the process," he says, referring not only to Gov. Rod Blagojevich but to any state executive.

As a seven-year legislator, Watson says his military experience has given him a new understanding of why it's wrong when an executive, for instance, shifts money to an initiative when it's unclear whether that money was approved in the state budget.

And he says this state could learn something from the planning process he went through in Iraq, when his team would set 90-day, 180-day and 270-day goals. "We would sit down with the general every week, and he would say, 'Watson, where are we on the bylaws? Where are we on attendance?' Can you imagine if a governor sat down with the Department of Transportation, the head of IDOT, and said, 'Where are we on these different projects?' every week to make sure that that focus was there?"

He previously served in the U.S. Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserves from 1985 to 1991, including one year overseas during Operation Desert Storm. He re-enlisted in June 2007.

Bethany Jaeger

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisisissues.uis.edu>

PEOPLE Update

- Illinois Supreme Court Justice **Thomas Fitzgerald** was installed September 8 as chief justice, replacing Justice **Robert Thomas**, whose three-year term as chief justice expired (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August, page 34).

People on the move

Two of Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administrators switched positions.

James Sledge is now director of the state's main administrative and procurement agency, Central Management Services. **Maureen O'Donnell** is director of the Illinois Department of Employment Security. (See *Illinois Issues*, April 2007, page 34.)

The administration offered little explanation other than this e-mailed statement: "During their combined years with the state, both director O'Donnell and director Sledge have many accomplishments under their belts, and these new appointments will allow them to fulfill all of their talents to an even greater extent, while continuing to help the people of Illinois. This move is an opportunity for growth for both directors."

Sledge, a lawyer, spent eight years as an assistant state's attorney in Cook County, practicing in the child support and domestic violence divisions. He joined the Blagojevich administration as director of the Illinois Human Rights Commission, which resolves civil rights complaints in such areas as housing and employment.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Saint Xavier University in Chicago and his law degree from the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

O'Donnell served as director of Central Management Services for about a year and a half after her stint as assistant director. She took over after the administration received federal subpoenas in an ongoing investigation of state hiring and contracting practices.

At Employment Security, she oversees activities related to unemployment benefits, career planning and economic development.

She holds a law degree from DePaul University College of Law, a master's of business administration from Northwestern University and is a registered nurse, according to the governor's office. In 1993, she became a litigation attorney for Ameritech Illinois.

Public access

Michael Matulis, former Springfield journalist and instructor, is now serving three roles for the Illinois attorney general's office.

He supports efforts to help reporters, local government officials and other community members understand state law pertaining to public information and public meetings. The job previously was overseen by **Terry Mutchler**, a lawyer who left for a similar post in Pennsylvania. The search for Mutchler's replacement is ongoing, as the position requires a legal counsel, says Robyn Ziegler, spokeswoman for the attorney general.

Matulis says he also assists with writing projects in the communications office and with public requests in the correspondence office.

He was hired shortly before the attorney general's office learned that about a quarter of its budget had been cut as Gov. Rod Blagojevich attempted to balance the state's entire operating budget. But Ziegler says Matulis' position was a consolidation of duties that was designed to save money.

"The responsibilities that he will be undertaking combined some of the responsibilities of three vacancies currently in the office," she says.

Matulis says expanding public access will be a challenge that requires a balancing act, particularly in politically sensitive areas.

"One thing you find in the trenches throughout a career is that there's a lot of people that don't really have much interest in public access, and I feel like the attorney general has a real honest desire to see Illinois get better than it is now," he says.

He lives in Pleasant Plains and has worked in journalism since high school. He taught journalism at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield for three years and also worked in public relations. At the Springfield daily newspaper, the *State Journal-Register*, he started the youth "Voice" section in 1995 and later served as editor of the editorial page.

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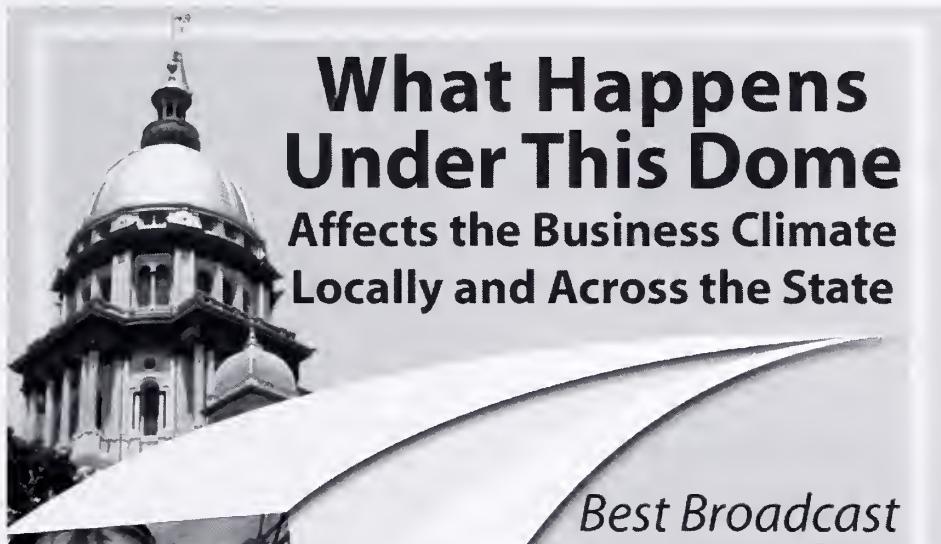
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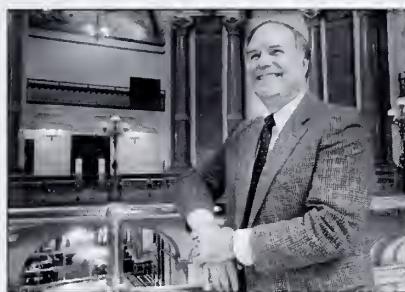
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Charles N. Wheeler III



This time around, voters are unaware of the Con-Con referendum

by Charles N. Wheeler III

As a news writing exercise, Advanced Public Affairs Reporting students at the University of Illinois at Springfield set out last month to discover what area folks thought about holding a constitutional convention to revise — or rewrite entirely — the state's 1970 charter.

In interviews with several hundred people, the graduate students discovered most had no idea that voters will be asked that very question in next month's general election. So the students explained that the current Constitution requires that the electorate be given the opportunity every 20 years to call a convention to review the document, and 2008 is the magic year. They still encountered a lot of indecision.

But when some added, oh, by the way, one of the changes delegates to a convention might propose is giving voters the right to boot officials they don't like, support for a Con-Con increased dramatically.

The informal survey hardly rose to the level of a statistically valid public opinion poll, of course. Most of those interviewed were central Illinois residents, where one would expect support for a recall amendment to be higher than in other parts of the state, for example, Chicago's Ravenswood neighborhood.

Still, the students' findings suggest a couple of interesting points: Not much public attention has been paid to the convention referendum; and lots of

The students' findings suggest a couple of interesting points: not much public attention has been paid to the convention referendum; and lots of Illinoisans are really unhappy with the state's current leadership (no surprise there, of course).

Illinoisans are really unhappy with the state's current leadership (no surprise there, of course). Both observations underscore how much the current climate differs from the prevailing political winds the last two times voters were asked the convention question, in 1968 and 1988.

The successful 1968 referendum, which led to the 1970 convention that drafted the current state charter, was the culmination of a decades-long effort to bring the state's century-old constitution into modern times. The formal process started in 1965 — three years before the actual vote — when the legislature created a commission to study the need for revision. Two years later, lawmakers

endorsed the panel's recommendations and placed the convention question on the November 1968 ballot. Meanwhile, two other commissions were named, the first to consider the mechanics for a convention, if voters wanted one, and the second to help the convention get started, after voters said they did. Moreover, Gov. Otto Kerner called for a convention in his 1967 State of the State address; later, the Democratic governor formed a blue-ribbon committee headed by well-regarded civic leaders to educate voters on the need for constitutional review, without embracing specific changes.

To prepare for the convention referendum two decades later, lawmakers in 1986 established a special committee to recommend whether a convention was needed. As part of its studies, the panel organized a two-day meeting of delegates to the 1970 convention and commissioned a series of scholarly background papers on the document. The legislature also provided that a pamphlet setting out the major arguments for and against a convention be mailed to every registered voter before the election.

Fast forward to 2008, and virtually none of the public information efforts made in connection with the prior referendums has taken place, with a lone exception: The secretary of state last month began sending out a voter education pamphlet, for which lawmakers

allocated \$4 million for printing and mailing costs.

While the issue may just be hitting the general public's radar screen, no strong consensus has developed among opinion leaders on the question, contrary to the experience leading up to the prior referendums.

Forty years ago, support for a convention was widespread, with political leaders of both parties, key business and labor leaders, civic and professional organizations, and newspaper editorial boards all agreeing the 1870 Constitution needed a makeover. Voters agreed, too, by a margin of better than 2-to-1, roughly 2.9 million yes to 1.1 million no votes.

Twenty years ago, the general sentiment among political and civic leaders was that the document was still too new — in effect for only 17 years — to need revisiting, and had been working well so far. Again, voters shared that assessment, rejecting the convention call by about a 3-to-1 margin, some 2.7 million votes opposed compared with

about 900,000 in favor.

This year, opinions about the need for a convention differ strongly among those paying attention. Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn, a fervent proponent, and former Comptroller (and 1970 Con-Con delegate) Dawn Clark Netsch, an equally adamant opponent, have debated the issue across the state (see Bethany Jaeger's Q&A with the pair on page 25). A broad-based coalition of interest groups — sort of a who's who among the political establishment — has formed to oppose the call, arguing that whatever changes may be needed in the basic charter can be made through constitutional amendments, without the cost and risk of a wide-open convention.

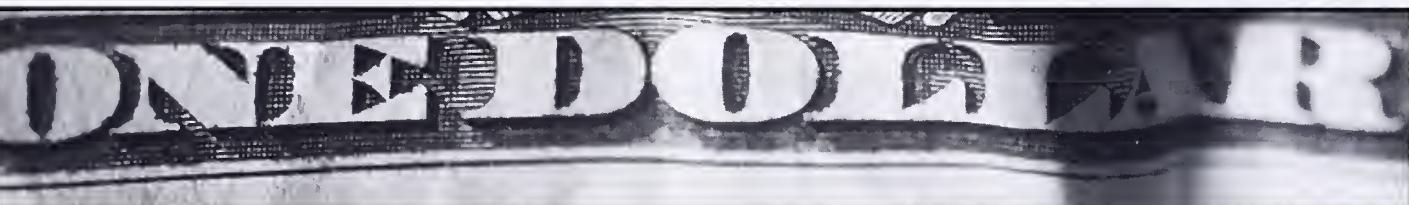
Proponents don't seem as well-organized (or funded) but argue their case passionately. One common theme underlies much of their rhetoric: The constitution needs to be rewritten to deal with inept or downright crooked political leaders who ignore voters' wishes on issues such as pay raises and ethics

reform. That's an appealing argument; witness the reaction the PAR students encountered when the folks they interviewed learned a convention could pave the way for voters to kick out officials they don't like.

But is it compelling? Clearly some constitutional changes aren't very likely ever to clear the legislature — to name one, an amendment to appoint judges, rather than elect them — so someone for whom so-called merit selection is the paramount issue probably should vote for a convention.

On issues involving the behavior of public officials, though, rather than the structure of government, perhaps what's really needed is for voters to exercise better judgment in choosing leaders. Remember, for all the grousing about Gov. Rod Blagojevich, he still won more votes than anybody else seeking the office in 2006. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.



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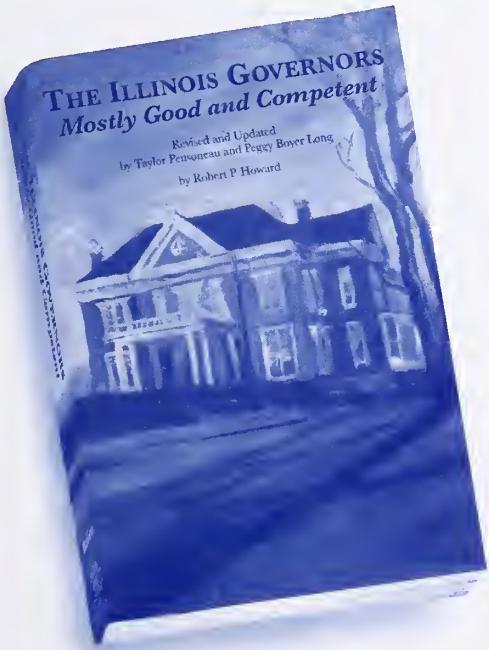


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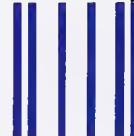
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